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**BOWING BEFORE CHRIST - NODDING  
TO THE STATE?**

**READING PAUL POLITICALLY WITH OLIVER  
O'DONOVAN AND JOHN HOWARD YODER**

**by**

**Dorothea H. Bertschmann**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Theology and Religion**

**Durham University**

**June 2012**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis offers a close reading of two Pauline texts, Philippians 2:5-11 and Romans 13:1-7. Inspired by recent scholarship it asks whether Paul can be read in a politically relevant way. An interaction with the works of political ethicists O'Donovan and Yoder precedes the exegetical part to focus more sharply on relevant issues. In all their distinctive emphases both ethicists hold that the primary result of Christ's Lordship is the church, which is (socio) political in a broad sense and governed by Christ. Christ's Lordship is reflected but not mediated by the church and even less so by the state. Political authority with its use of temporal power is still needed by the church. The Christ-event indirectly affects political authority, re-locating and re-enlisting it. The church is both to grant the state some autonomy and to engage it with its evangelical ethos.

Like O'Donovan and Yoder, Paul uses the metaphor of Christ's Lordship with all its variable potential in a resolutely ecclesial way. He portrays the church as a socio-political body constituted and sustained by Christ's Lordship, which nevertheless does not strive to be fully politicized and still needs structures of political authority.

Unlike O'Donovan and Yoder, Paul sees political rule to be unaffected by the Christ event. While Paul's narrative arguably shifts the center of hope and loyalty to Christ, this is not used to engage political rulers either positively or negatively.

The latter's task is unchanged and given approval as an abiding aspect of the divine work. While it does not match the height of God's deed in Christ as embodied by the church, it shows the Christ believers that their 'good' is perfectly compatible with the demands of political rulers.

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## **Abbreviations**

This thesis follows the abbreviations of the SBL style guide.

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father

**FELIX BERTSCHMANN**

**1935 - 2012**

with gratitude for his inspiration, love and support

# 1. Introduction

## A. Research Context

Paul and Politics – during lengthy periods of New Testament interpretation this did not seem to be a particularly exciting or controversial field. Paul offers the fullest explicit admonition on ‘the state’ in the New Testament in Romans 13:1-7, which together with Mark 12:13-17 and parallels has become the *locus classicus* of ‘the New Testament’s teaching on the state.’ This text, while proving to be an embarrassment for various persecuted or non-conformist Christian groups as well as for ecclesial elites wrestling for power with their secular counterparts was certainly often qualified and hotly debated throughout the ages. Still, Paul’s basic advice seemed clear enough: political authority is from God and Christian people, certainly ordinary ‘subjects’, are to be submissive and compliant.

The disaster of Nazism in Germany with churches from all traditions often passively looking on or looking away gave new momentum to the debate: Is Paul the ally of dictators? Does he sponsor political quietism and in turn political authoritarianism? While the German debate often found Paul’s concrete political admonition wanting and tried to move beyond it (see below, 6.1), a recent current of Pauline scholarship which has its epicenter in the United States proposes a very different reading of Paul’s overall message in the first place: Paul’s Gospel, it is argued, is directly set up against the proud and pretentious claims of (Roman) Imperial power.<sup>1</sup> In this view Paul says implicitly but clearly that the Christian believers confess and follow a very different Lord from Lord Caesar, that is, Jesus Christ, who will ultimately win the day and bring other rules to nothing. Important exponents of this new approach in Pauline studies are R.A. Horsley, N.T. Wright, N. Elliott and many others.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I will concentrate on scholarly voices, who remain close to Paul’s Christological narrative and its particular historical context. There is a much broader revival of Paul and Politics studies going on, where Paul’s figures of thought are made fruitful for contemporary political philosophy on a more sophisticated and abstracted level (cf. A. Badiou, *St Paul: La Fondation de l’Universalisme* [Paris: PUF, 1998]; G. Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, [tr. P. Dailey ;Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005]; J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* [Stanford:Stanford University, 2004]).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R.A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), idem, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel,*

Of crucial importance for this reading, which is now often labeled ‘anti-Imperial’ is the observation of shared vocabulary between Paul’s language and Imperial vocabulary. At the heart of various parallels is the early Christian confession that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’, which has time and again fascinated exegetes as a possible contrasting confession to ‘Caesar is Lord’.<sup>3</sup> The list of ‘shared language’ has been greatly broadened since, and includes terms such as παρουσία, εἰρήνη, δικαιοσύνη, εὐαγγέλιον, ἐκκλησία.<sup>4</sup> At the heart of these various readings is the assumption that the Christ-believers nurture, embody and pass on a narrative of the true King, who brings true peace, true salvation and true greatness over against the cynical and blasphemous promises of political rulers, especially the Roman emperor. Power, allegiance and obedience are seen as a zero-sum-game in this view: one can only be loyal to one Lord at a time, more so, if this Lord is or claims to be the ultimate Lord. The historical illustration for this sharp conflict is seen in the Christian refusal to worship the emperor as divine. Because Christ is seen as a very *different* Lord, his rule is often seen not just as trumping but as positively subverting other rules: Christ is humble - rulers are proud. Christ suffers - rulers dominate. Christ sponsors equality and sharing - rulers foster hierarchies and fierce competition for honour.<sup>5</sup> The Anti-Imperial strand of Pauline readings has proved to be extraordinarily fertile. It must be credited with saving Paul’s political metaphors from becoming all too trite and attempting to read them against the concrete background of 1<sup>st</sup> century political life. At the same time this movement brings an exciting sense of relevance, especially in

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*Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), idem, ed., *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); idem, *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); N.T. Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire’ in Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics*, 160-183; idem, ‘Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans’ in C. Bartholomew, J. Chaplin, R. Song, A. Wolter, eds., *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O’Donovan* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 173-93; also cf. Crossan, J.D., and J.L. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’ Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> For some of the older investigations of this theme cf. e.g. B. Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren* (Berlin: E. Grosser, 1877 reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1969); A.A.T. Ehrhardt, ‘Jesus Christ and Alexander the Great’, *JTS* 46 (1945), 45-51; E. Lohmeyer, *Christuskult und Kaiserkult* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1919).

<sup>4</sup> For a list cf. S. Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 5-7.

<sup>5</sup> For the latter cf. especially R. Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). Most recently Harrison has drawn a contrast-comparison between Roman δόξα and Paul’s re-evaluation thereof (J.R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (WUNT 273; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

the US context, where these readings proved to be a strong critical resource over against the easy equation of being American and being a Christian and over against an US foreign policy, which was by many perceived to be aggressive and ‘Imperial’.

While this reading has a strong instant appeal and promises to set right some long-standing problematic readings there are also problems:

*Firstly*, political authority is widely seen as negative by default in this reading. It is of course true that political authority is not dealt with in the abstract but in the problematic incarnation of the Roman emperor (or President Bush for that matter). The question remains why Paul can speak so positively (at least at first glance) in Romans 13:1-7. Most anti-Imperial readers have to make strenuous attempts to relativize this text or to read it against the grain of what it seems to say (cf. 6.1). While these attempts may be eventually convincing the spontaneous impression that Paul takes no issue with earthly rulers’ activities is hard to suppress.

*Secondly* it is often not clear what the critique is precisely about. Is critique of the emperor a sub-category of idolatry critique? Could the conflict be settled if Christians did not have to worship the emperor as divine? How widespread was this precise conflict anyway at the time Paul wrote his letters?<sup>6</sup>

Or are there broader issues that let Christ and the emperor stand as irreconcilable opponents? Is it the emperor’s military apparatus, his lust for power and luxury that makes him a target for critique? If this is so, we wonder whether the emperor could not be reformed, instead of disposed of. Or is any emperor who falls short of being a suffering servant wanting? Perhaps the problem is principally theocratic: God has come up with the final cosmic ruler of the world, who will not tolerate any rival. If God in Christ subverts or overthrows all other rule we can indeed understand how the confession ‘Christ is Lord’ can be read in a zero-sum fashion. But if rulers are still needed and are just in need of a strong dose of prophetic critique it is not quite clear why the confession of Christ’s Lordship should automatically threaten them.

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<sup>6</sup> For a brief discussion of the persecution issue cf. 5.1.4. d) .



*Thirdly* and closely related to the previous category are questions about the status and role of the church. While the church is often stylized as an alternative and counter-cultural community by anti-Imperial authors it remains unclear what this means for its wider dealings with civic bodies, earthly rulers and political institutions. A stance of defiant ‘otherness’ is clearly advocated by Anti-Imperial scholars – but does this entail passive resistance, active rebellion or modest participation when facing the outside world, in particular the state? Is the church meant to strive for self-sufficiency? Most proposals get vague at this stage. Romans 13:1-7 is given limited approval as a commendable and prudent strategy at the time in question. This looks, however, like a rather timid proposal after the postulated apocalyptic fireworks of the fierce denouncing of all things Imperial.

Connected to this is an often unclear and problematic use of the word ‘political’. It is used to denote a wide range of efforts of communal organizations as well as the concentration of certain means of power in the hands of a few agents.

## **B. Research Question and Methodology**

Going through these recent and stimulating reading strategies in relation to Paul’s potential political message I suspect that Paul’s use of political imagery and political metaphors is rather more complex than the clear-cut narrative of the anti-Imperial strand would have it.

In this thesis I want to take one step back and give a more coherent account of Paul’s political discourse. I will ask what political imagery we find in Paul, and how precisely he uses this imagery. I will probe how Paul deals with the often multi-faceted political metaphors in his own rhetoric and what strategic goals he tries to reach by applying them in certain ways. In all this I will inquire what Paul’s political language implies for the life of the church, for the world of politics and for the interactions of the church with political authority.

My ambition is not to disentangle all the knots and conundra but, on the contrary, to highlight as clearly as possible the junctions and crossings where Paul’s ‘political talk’ becomes complex.

While the anti-Imperial strand of Pauline scholarship has encountered some sharp and valuable criticism on historical, literary and theological grounds, I suggest there is a further need for mapping out Paul's thought on the basis of a more comprehensive notion or vision of political theology.<sup>7</sup> In order to become attentive not just to Paul's political imagery and its possible historical parallels<sup>8</sup> but to the very precise ways he uses and shapes, transforms and drops, links and disconnects these images with both his Gospel message and the political world, I need some experienced guides with a coherent account of political theology, who will point out sensitive spots, crucial trajectories and fields of tension in my search for the political Paul. I need a map, in other words, which indicates what the most important building blocks of a viable political-theological narrative might be, a narrative which is broader than an impromptu polemical outburst against an evil ruler. I need some pointers as to how political imagery can be transferred from its Christological narrative to affect and transform the world of politics. What are the obvious trajectories but also pitfalls in this process?

I have chosen as my guides Oliver O'Donovan and John Howard Yoder with their respective narratives of political theology. I am confident that approaching Pauline texts within such a horizon of a clear account of political theology will throw fresh light on our worries and assumptions about the (a) political Paul.

---

<sup>7</sup> One example of critique is Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, who argues partly on grounds of logic and partly theologically against an anti-Imperial reading. Another example is J.M.G. Barclay, 'Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul' in idem, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 363-387, who interacts in particular with N.T. Wright's work and argues mostly historically with a theological *finale*.

<sup>8</sup> The question of how to assess parallel language will accompany this thesis. The assumption that parallel means polemical is criticized by Barclay, 'Roman Empire', 376-377. Marchal sees similar parallels to most anti-Imperial authors, but instead of seeing positive potential of resistance in the Pauline use of language he deplores it as a case of mimicry, where Paul transfers the oppressive Roman structures into the church (J. Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender and Empire in the Study of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), e.g. 54-57. Blumenfeld is a lonely voice, who believes that Paul uses similar language in order to uphold and transform the Roman Empire with the help of the Gospel (B. Blumenfeld, *The Political Paul: Justice, Democracy and Kingship in a Hellenistic Framework* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001). I will principally maintain some openness towards various possibilities (e.g. parallels used polemically, affirmingly or in some other way) but will pay close attention to the recognizable and explicit ways in which Paul uses them, without proposing coded language.

For this task I could certainly turn to a host of very fine theological-political thinkers both contemporary and from the past. I have chosen O'Donovan and Yoder because both are representative of distinctive but recognized theological-political traditions, O'Donovan of the Augustinian, Yoder of the Mennonite one. Despite important differences in their thinking there are sufficient commonalities to make a dialogue viable. To both thinkers the Biblical material is an important source of inspiration. This is obviously not confined to the Pauline literature. But the fact that both authors identify a coherent biblical narrative which has its climax in the Christ story makes it easier to connect my own Pauline inquiry with their vision than if my conversation partners were for instance natural law theorists. The latter tradition will only get the briefest mentions in relevant places where either O'Donovan or Yoder refer to it themselves. A more profound interaction with this important strand of Christian political thinking is beyond the scope of this project.

Yoder never directly engages O'Donovan in his work and O'Donovan responds much more to Stanley Hauerwas than to Yoder. Still, various political ethicists have felt that the two thinkers could be brought into a fruitful, albeit largely fictitious conversation.<sup>9</sup>

The enterprise, which I outlined above, is of course fraught with dangers:

*Firstly* Paul was not a coherent political theorist and can hardly be made to fit the precise categories of political theorists.

*Secondly* Paul must not be pressed anachronistically to answer questions we throw at him from a modern perspective.

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<sup>9</sup> The most comprehensive and careful study was done by P.G. Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion: Post-Christian Protestant Political Theology in John Howard Yoder and Oliver O'Donovan*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2009). Others include H. G. Ulrich, 'Kirchlich-politisches Zeugnis vom Frieden Gottes: Friedensethik zwischen politischer Theologie und politischer Ethik ausgehend von John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas und Oliver O'Donovan', *Oekumenische Rundschau* (2006) 55/2, 149-170 and Travis Kroeker, 'Why O'Donovan's Christendom is not Constantinian and Yoder's Voluntarism is not Hobbesian: A Debate in Theological Politics Re-defined', *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 20 (2000), 41-64. Dennis Hollinger and David P. Gushee mention both theologians in their summary article on Evangelical Ethics (Hollinger, Dennis and David P. Gushee, 'Evangelical Ethics: Profile of a Movement Coming of Age', *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 20 (2000), 181-203.

*Thirdly* Christian outlines of political theology are themselves indebted not least to Paul and Pauline texts, and we are either going to be stuck in some simplistic proof-texting or drown in some overly complex mirror-conversations, where all the conversation partners are hopelessly tangled up with each other.

However, if we bear these dangers in mind I think they can be minimized:

*Firstly*, by choosing the work of O'Donovan and Yoder as my travelling companions and guides in my reading of Paul, I will not confront Paul with a coherent system or vision and find him wanting in comparison. I will rather explore how Paul deals with the especially dense 'junctions' and complex categories I find in O'Donovan's and Yoder's narrative, e.g. how the Lordship of Christ can be related to the activities of earthly rulers. It may well be that Paul is silent where we expect him to speak and speaks where we expect him to be silent. This in itself can be enlightening.

*Secondly*, in each reading of Paul or other Biblical authors it is inevitable that we bring our agendas and assumptions to the table. In fact, the anti-Imperial readings are driven by much contemporary anxiety, as shown above. Our contemporary questions, hopes and worries are inevitable in any reading process and make such a process interesting and pregnant with new possibilities in the first place. Blatantly anachronistic questions such as 'What did Paul think about Parliamentary Democracy?' have of course no place and are avoided by the sufficiently broad and fundamental character of the categories I will use to probe Paul's political thinking. Approaching the Pauline texts with categories and questions won from O'Donovan and Yoder will make the process more self-reflexive and transparent.

*Thirdly*, in order to generate a meaningful dialogue it will be important to give each conversation partner their own weight and space. The works of O'Donovan and Yoder will be duly considered and evaluated in their own right before I will point out the relevant interpretative categories and crystallizing points in their works, which can be made useful as reading glasses or microscopes for Paul. O'Donovan relies on a dynamic narrative in his account of political authority which is important to grasp in order to understand the individual building blocks of his theory. Yoder's vision is less shaped by the flow of a narrative but in his case, too, an overall map will be helpful before I focus on more detailed elements of it.

The Pauline texts will be read from the distinctive angle and with the questions in mind that we have gained from the interaction with O'Donovan's and Yoder's work. Still, during the exegetical investigations close attention will be paid to literary and historical problems surrounding these texts and to the solutions proposed by Biblical scholarship.

At the end of each Pauline section I will show how Paul's way of dealing with his political images and his (not) creating of a theo-political narrative compares to O'Donovan's and Yoder's vision and to their strategies at similar points.

This does not mean that Yoder and O'Donovan are the defining authorities of the conversation or the ultimate judges in the exegesis. In the process of bringing the categories and questions inspired by their account to the Pauline text, the questions and categories themselves might well be challenged and changed. Some of them might remain unanswered. On the other hand it is not my intention to evaluate O'Donovan's or Yoder's thinking before the tribunal of Pauline theology. Though I may sometimes evaluate Yoder's and O'Donovan's exegesis of an individual Pauline text this is not the main focus of my work.<sup>10</sup>

### **C. Structure of the Thesis**

I will start my thesis by giving an account of both O'Donovan's and Yoder's theo-political vision in chapters 2 and 3.

After giving some context to the work of both scholars I will outline their narrative of God's dealings with the world in Christ and the church, and how this affects the world of politics.

This more descriptive part will be followed by an analytical one, in which I will identify some central figures of thought with the promising but also problematic potential in both authors.

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<sup>10</sup> For an evaluation of O'Donovan's use of the Bible cf. V. P. Furnish, 'How Firm a Foundation? Some Questions About Scripture in *The Desire of the Nations*', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 11(1998), 18-23 and W. Moberly, 'The Use of Scripture in *The Desire of the Nations*', Bartholomew-Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 46-64.

The first fruit of my reading of Yoder and O'Donovan will be the identification of four thematic fields, which can be made serviceable as interpretative categories both to sum up and to probe O'Donovan's and Yoder's thinking more deeply and later on to explore Paul's moves in his political discourse. These thematic fields or categories are as follows:

- a) The notion and understanding of 'the political' and of political authority in Yoder and O'Donovan
- b) The notion and understanding of Christ's Lordship and of Christ's interacting with political rulers
- c) The notion and understanding of the church as a 'political community'
- d) The modes of interaction between the church and 'the state' in the eschatological age<sup>11</sup>

This step involves a degree of abstraction which is however sufficiently safeguarded by the descriptive part. There is no particular reason for dealing with O'Donovan first and with Yoder secondly, except the fact that Yoder pictured himself sometimes as a late-comer to an already lively discussion of mainstream ethicists and often argues against this tradition.

Following the political-ethical section I will sum up my observations and analytical remarks in an 'Interlude' chapter 4. This chapter will serve to pull together my various observations gained through the interaction with O'Donovan and Yoder and to sketch out in greater detail the shades and textures of their categories. This chapter will equally prepare for the exegetical section by making suggestions about how the categories won from O'Donovan and Yoder could be used in the exegetical section.

In chapters 5 and 6 I will turn at last to two selected Pauline texts and try to read them in the light of O'Donovan's and Yoder's narratives. Instead of giving an overview of various or all Pauline texts I decided to choose two samples for some deeper probing.

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<sup>11</sup> Whenever I use the expression 'the state' I use it tentatively and sometimes in inverted commas, as it too easily evokes our notion of a highly abstract institution that transcends and reins in the power of individual representatives. The term 'eschatological age' refers to the period between the Resurrection and the Parousia. When I want to refer to the final consummation instead, I will make this clear.

The choice of Romans 13:1-7 seems to be justified by virtue of the explicit and comparatively extensive reflection on political authority in the text and by the immense and ambiguous impact the passage has had in the history of political theology, especially in recent decades of exegesis. As I will show Romans 13:1-7 is closely interwoven with its context (cf. 6.1.1.). It is appropriate to read 13:1-7 together with chp. 12 and Romans 13:8-14.

My second text is Philippians 2:5-11, famously known as the 'Philippian hymn'. This text sums up in poetic form the central creed of early Christians about the Lordship of Christ and therefore promises to be of importance for our inquiry. Christ's Lordship is placed in a cosmic framework of breath-taking dimensions. Though a text such as Colossians 1: 15-22 offers a similarly wide and cosmic panorama, Philippians has the advantage of being an undisputed Pauline letter. Philippians also contains some interesting traces of political vocabulary (Phil. 1:27; 3:20-21), which have been much noted and commented upon in recent scholarship. Philippians 2:5-11, too, must be read in its context, despite its standing out in the wider letter. Traces of the poem have been rightly noted in chp. 3 (cf. 5.3.1) which will therefore also be part of our inquiry.

I expect the juxtaposition and correlation of these texts to be fruitful because they both speak about political authority in very different ways: Philippians confesses the supreme authority of Christ and seems to orient all other authority towards him. But does the text talk about other rulers at all? Romans 13: 1-7 speaks about political authority but seemingly not about Christ.

Both sample texts have attracted extraordinary scholarly attention and there is now not just a stream but a vast ocean of secondary literature in both cases. Dealing with these texts I will have to limit myself very strictly to a comparatively small selection of commentaries and journal articles. I will include a sample of both classics and recent work from the German and English speaking world of Biblical scholarship. Intriguing questions such as the pre-history of the Philippians hymn will be dealt with very briefly insofar as they are not of central importance to my project.

Important dialogue partners, though not the only ones, will be selected voices from the already mentioned anti-Imperial strand of Pauline scholarship, both in relation to

Philippians and to Romans. As the focus of my thesis is not primarily and exclusively historical, I will rely on reconstructions and proposals of exegetes who have worked in this field. The historical and archaeological context is an important aspect for the questions I am raising. I will therefore briefly assess the helpfulness and probability of a number of historical reconstructions, as far as possible and necessary. While the historical scenarios set the scene and allow for a certain range of possible readings I will focus most of all on a close reading of the texts themselves with their own dynamic and argumentative structure, paying special attention to the interpretative categories gleaned from Yoder's and O'Donovan's work.

I see the primary context of Romans 13:1-7 and Philippians 2:5-11 and 3 to be the wider letters they are part of. In cases where I feel the need to trace broader movements of thought in Paul I will primarily concentrate my observations on the 'mother letters' of my sample texts, which seem to me to be more defining than texts from the wider Greco-Roman world or even from other Pauline epistles.

I will discuss Philippians first, which some could challenge if it were the case that Philippians was composed as one of Paul's last letters (perhaps as late as 60-61 AD in Rome, cf. 5.1.3) whereas Romans is usually seen as being composed in Corinth around 54-57 AD. Though changed circumstances could certainly lead to considerably changed attitudes in Paul's thinking, not least in his assessment of political authority, I cannot see hints of any such dramatic changes, nor will I make a case for any significant historical development between the composition of the two letters. My sequence is justified as much on theological as on historical grounds: The confession of Christ's Lordship is very old and presumably precedes Paul's own mission. Paul's practical remarks on concrete political authority look more like - important - second thoughts, which may or may not be closely connected to the confession. On the whole, not too much weight should be given to my order – it could have been done the other way around.

In my conclusion, chapter 7, I will sum up my findings on how Paul deals in his own narrative with the categories derived from O'Donovan and Yoder. I will bring Paul one last time into conversation with Yoder and O'Donovan, comparing and contrasting their trajectories, emphases and strategies in using political language. I will ask in particular how O'Donovan and Yoder deal with the blank spaces and



disconnections in Paul's narrative. Do they offer credible ways beyond the Pauline vision? On the other hand I will wonder whether Paul has something to offer beyond some of the impasses I identify in O'Donovan and Yoder.

I aim to show that Paul uses political imagery in a very distinctive way, which does not sit easily with conservative quietist uses, but equally defies straight-forward anti-Imperial readings. I will claim that Paul's own reading strategy in using these charged metaphors and images is clear, and avoids many of the problems we get ourselves into. I will also, however, point out that Paul's use of these images leaves open ends, untouched potentials and blank spaces that call out for further reflection.

I hope to be able to show that Paul's thinking, at a deep level, has a lot to offer to our deliberations on authority, but also to expose the limitations to the modern desire to hear Paul speak in a politically relevant way.

## 2. Oliver O'Donovan and the Obedience of Rulers

### 2.1 The Dialectic of Church and State

#### 2.1.1 The Context

Oliver O'Donovan, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology in the University of Oxford until 2006 and now Professor for Christian ethics in Edinburgh, writes in a Western European context with its long and varied history with Christianity. Most societies in this context are now secular and pluralistic. Nonetheless there are still publicly visible Christian traditions persisting, and often a mainstream denomination, in O'Donovan's case the Church of England, has numerous ties to public institutions in its role as the 'established church'.

Christianity, especially the period of Christendom, evokes highly ambiguous feelings in such a context and is often linked with oppression and violence. Many intellectuals would favour a narrative of growing emancipation from the church which gave Europe its present freedom and, among other gifts, liberal democracies. Other voices criticise the impasses of our liberal culture as the late fruits of a Christian, and especially Protestant, heritage. Over against these voices O'Donovan sets out to tell the story of a Christendom that "...was the womb in which our late-modernity came to birth."<sup>1</sup> O'Donovan, who has published a number of contributions on Augustine<sup>2</sup> traces the development of European political institutions from Patristic to Mediaeval times conversing with the outstanding theological and political thinkers of the time and eventually, via the Reformation, to Modernity.<sup>3</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup> O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 194.

<sup>2</sup> O. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); O. O'Donovan, 'Usus and fruitio in Augustine: *De doctrina Christiana* I', *JTS* 33 (1982), 361-397; O. O'Donovan, 'Augustine's *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought' *Dionysus* 11 (1987), 89-110.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the magisterial source collection on Christian political thinking: O. O'Donovan and J. Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

comprehensive presentation of political theology, *The Desire of the Nations* reaches even further back, considering the biblical roots of European Christendom and subsequent liberalism. *The Desire of the Nations* is the first volume of two. *The Ways of Judgment* is the sequel that deals with political ethics.<sup>4</sup> In giving an account of O'Donovan's narrative of how God's deed in Christ affected the world of politics I will refer almost exclusively to the former volume which presents an extremely rich and comprehensive vision of the foundations of political theology.

### 2.1.2 The Task: Assessing Political Liberalism

In *The Desire of the Nations* O'Donovan unfolds the foundations for a responsible contemporary political theology. Politics cannot exist without a greater picture about the whence and whither of society and in fact humankind. The universalising of the rhetoric of suspicion leads to an impasse where political affirmations become unintelligible and unsustainable: "A politics that does not encompass the direction of society ceases to be politics at all. But there is no room for direction in a society ruled by the universal imperative of suspicion."<sup>5</sup> While various forms of liberation theology have boldly reclaimed theological concepts to guide political thinking, their concepts are often eclectic and lack relevance for the Northern hemisphere. In particular, the question of authority is crucial for political theology in the Western world.<sup>6</sup> O'Donovan professes to be a grateful student of the 'High Tradition' of Christian political thinking which had its climax in the era we call Christendom.<sup>7</sup> Christendom, as a historical idea "of a professedly Christian secular political order..." offers both a reading of the political concepts found in Scripture and of ourselves.<sup>8</sup> This, however, does not make O'Donovan an advocate of a remaking of Christendom and even less an enemy of modernity and its important fruit, political liberalism.<sup>9</sup> The latter is O'Donovan's interlocutor through much of his book. Political liberalism is in many ways the child of Christendom, O'Donovan claims,

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<sup>4</sup> O. O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donovan suggests the period from 1100-1650. Cf. O'Donovan, *Desire*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 194-195.

<sup>9</sup> O'Donovan does *not* "re-describe the political meaning of the Christian narrative vision for the late modern West and ...show how liberalism represents a false version" (Kroecker, 'Debate', 43).

even if it has wandered away from its father's house. The crucial question is: "To what extent is Christian political thought tied to the liberal tradition?"<sup>10</sup> The author stresses that in judging liberalism in its complex development we always need to deploy double-discernment: we can trace Christ's victory in this movement but also see the face of Antichrist. At any rate political liberalism needs to be connected to its transcendent and religious roots in order to stay in healthy shape.<sup>11</sup> By cutting off or concealing its religious roots liberalism has always been in danger of becoming formalistic, mechanistic and, in a fatal way, anthropocentric. O'Donovan's main target is "...the pretentiousness of the autonomous political order."<sup>12</sup> An acephalous society lacks true community identity.<sup>13</sup> It is important to realise that purpose, moral content and identity cannot be given to a society through its own collective will-power, O'Donovan states in his repeated attacks against contractarianism.<sup>14</sup> The divine 'given' is essential.<sup>15</sup> O'Donovan sets himself the task of finding "true political concepts"<sup>16</sup> which are found in Scripture and which disclose the structure of reality. Political theology has the task to respond to these concepts by developing a descriptive theory which is the presupposition for any political ethics.

### 2.1.3 The Narrative

#### 2.1.3.1 God's Gift of Political Authority

##### a) YHWH's Kingship

The primary gift of God to society is political authority. Without political authority there is no societal identity. With authority, on the other hand, there is identity and a defined social space for free and intelligible actions.<sup>17</sup> This correlation of identity and

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<sup>10</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 227.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 219-220.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>14</sup> "The doctrine that *we* set up political authority, as a device to secure our own essentially private, local and unpolitical purposes, has left the Western democracies in a state of pervasive moral debilitation, which, from time to time, inevitably throws up idolatrous and authoritarian reactions" (ibid., 49; similarly ibid., 46).

<sup>15</sup> YHWH's command has an "alien-familiar character", "...the purpose it expressed was not their purpose, but it was a purpose that corresponded to the *telos* of their own beings" (ibid., 32). In order to find ourselves we must reach beyond ourselves.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>17</sup> Authority is "the objective correlate of freedom" (ibid., 30).

authority becomes very clear in the Hebrew Bible: YHWH reveals his kingship as the paradigm of political authority. Through the threefold activities of salvation-deliverance, judgment and possession (of law and land), YHWH shows himself as Israel's God and gives the Israelites identity as his people.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen "as a point of disclosure from which the nature of all political authority comes into view. Out of the self-possession of this people in their relation to God springs the possibility of other peoples' possessing themselves in God."<sup>19</sup> Israel acknowledges its identity under God's authority through worship: "The community is a political community by virtue of being a worshipping community..."<sup>20</sup> YHWH's rule is eventually mediated through the unitary structure of kingship: the king is deliverer, judge and defender of the land. But the king remains subject to the law and has to reckon with the prophetic *vis-à-vis*.<sup>21</sup> O'Donovan never tires of stressing that "...community is the aboriginal fact from beginning to end..."<sup>22</sup> This is plain from the Old Testament witness. However, in times of crisis and disruption of tradition the individual increasingly has an honoured role as the faithful bearer of the community's tradition. Examples for this are the exilic prophets.<sup>23</sup>

## **b) Exile**

Israel's religious identity was thus closely tied to, and expressed through, its distinctive political existence as a nation under a king in its own country. All this we can discern from the paradigm of YHWH's kingship. When Israel had to surrender to alien political power it learnt to live under dual authority. Not only was there a co-existence as people among another people, but also a double government: YHWH was still king even in the midst of judgment, and to a degree his kingship was mediated through the punishing and judging agencies of foreign powers.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand Israel had to live under an alien government of Imperial powers. The Diaspora situation provided opportunities for both separation and influence.<sup>25</sup> But

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<sup>18</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 62 -65.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 73-81.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 85, 86.

fundamentally this situation did not match Israel's calling to be a distinctive nation under God's rule. Israel was alienated from its true political existence and this sad state of exile lasted well into the time of re-settlement in Israel under Persian rule.

### c) **The mission of Jesus**

In O'Donovan's view, Jesus as the Son of Man did nothing less than to challenge this dual authority and proclaim the end of that settlement. The key is Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of God. In word and deed Jesus made it clear that God's 'all-sovereign' kingly rule was at hand.<sup>26</sup> O'Donovan detects the same structure of salvation-judgment-possession in a transformed key in Jesus' ministry: Jesus liberates people from alienating powers (demons) and illnesses, though not from the foreign oppressors. However, these gestures as an exorcist and healer must be understood as gestures of empowerment of a deeply exhausted and therefore depoliticised society.<sup>27</sup> Jesus' judgment is reflected in his denouncement of the leaders of the people and his stance with the poor and needy.<sup>28</sup> Possession is reflected in Jesus' teaching on the Law and his gathering of the Twelve as the representatives of "...the life of the restored Israel living under the authorization of the coming Kingdom."<sup>29</sup> The faith with which people increasingly greet Jesus corresponds to the praise with which the people of Israel acknowledge their God and the acclamation with which a people recognises given authority.<sup>30</sup> Political concepts are valuable to describe Jesus' ministry. On the other hand Jesus' ministry throws new light on these concepts and transforms them by rendering the familiar unfamiliar. "The problem is with the assumption that we move from "core" political concepts to the Kingdom of God as from the known to the unknown. Precisely the opposite movement is called for. Can we not be introduced to a kind of rule that is unlike, as well as like, the kind of rule with which we are familiar?"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jesus acts with divine authority "...in which word and act are one"(O'Donovan, *Desire*, 89).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 93-96.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 96-100.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 113ff.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 119.

#### **d) Jesus and the rulers**

What then about the real existing rulers? Though it is clear in O'Donovan's view that the foreign powers have had their day, he distances Jesus emphatically from any revolutionary or Zealot thinking. His is a more subtle and profound mission: "Jesus' concern...was with the re-authorising of Israel rather than with the de-authorising of Rome."<sup>32</sup>

O'Donovan portrays Jesus as displaying nonchalant deference to political rulers (e.g. in the census-story) as to anachronistic and passing authorities: Jesus recognized only a transitory duality which belonged to the climax of Israel's history, a duality between the coming and the passing order. So the duality inherited from Israel's past underwent a transformation. "The Two Cities with their...Two Rules...gave way to the Two Eras."<sup>33</sup> The present rulers can almost be ignored as figures of the past. The "...provisional authorities have been swept aside."<sup>34</sup> Jesus focuses on gathering and empowering the people of God in a non-political way at first glance but in a way which shows itself to be politically meaningful.

### **2.1.3.2 The Re-conception of Authority in the Age of the Church**

#### **a) The proclamation of the risen Lord**

After this powerful proclamation and announcement of the Kingdom we see the church proclaiming Christ. This does by no means indicate that the early Christians quietly dropped the idea that God's rule was at hand and instead focused on a heavenly saviour. On the contrary the early Christian proclamation "... told the story of what happened when the Kingdom came: its conflict with the established principalities and powers and its vindication at God's hand through Jesus' resurrection."<sup>35</sup> High Christology does not replace the proclamation of the Kingdom but crowns it in affirming that Christ is God's mediator-representative, mediating

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<sup>32</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 117.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 120.

God's rule and representing God's people.<sup>36</sup> In Christ Israel and humankind are judged and vindicated, severed from old authorities and put under new ones.<sup>37</sup>

God wins his decisive victory in Christ, who is not only the mediator of God's rule but also the double-representative of Israel and God respectively. But the representative of Israel is at the same time the representative of humanity: the Son of Man "...who is to vindicate humanity against bestiality."<sup>38</sup> Besides this double-representation, O'Donovan detects a moment of lethal confrontation between Christ and the rulers of his day in the Passion: "Pilate's incomprehension represents the unawareness of the bestial empire against which the Son of Man is to be vindicated."<sup>39</sup> While the resurrection vindicates humanity in the face of destructive forces, the Ascension is the public affirmation of the Kingdom. The latter is a "secret foundation, since that ultimate publicity has not occurred; yet in no sense is it a private foundation, but one which determines all public existence."<sup>40</sup> The royal imagery of Ascension-Exaltation sets the horizon of hope, "...not a hope for our own private futures only but for the future of the world subject to God's reign."<sup>41</sup> Its hiddenness points to the future fulfilling which is yet to happen.

#### **b) The challenge of political authorities**

This royal climax of the Christ-event or rather the Christ-drama has serious consequences for political authority. The latter is challenged, in principle expropriated and reconceived as having a strictly limited right of existence.<sup>42</sup> This limited right consists in providing a certain social space for the church's mission. We have seen that O'Donovan detects a threefold structure in the political *esse*: there is salvation or power, which is the ability to rescue a people from danger and defend it,

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<sup>36</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 123.

<sup>37</sup> O'Donovan's treatment of Israel is highly complex and can only be hinted at within the space of this thesis: Israel is both paradigmatic of and an abiding unique actor in God's salvation history: "Israel can never be replaced" (ibid., 131). The church must neither inherit Israel's political existence (O'Donovan likes to refer to Israel's 'public traditions' as listed in Romans 9:4-5, cf. O'Donovan, *Desire*, 25; 132) by becoming a theocracy, nor spiritualise Israel's political hope (ibid., 26f.). Both actors interact with the state and wrestle side by side (for this triangular structure cf. ibid., 220-221) to propel history towards the eschatological goal of a redeemed new *polis*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>42</sup> "...the subjection of the angelic powers of government to the rule of Christ is one aspect of justification, the fruit of Christ's triumph over death and hell" (ibid., 216).



through military means, among others; there is judgment or right, the just mediating between the people; and finally there is possession. This denotes the land and the law in Israel. Concerning other nations the notion of possession talks about various traditions, which define a people and give them collective identity. From the threefold structure ‘salvation-judgment-possession’ only the function of judgment remains for secular authorities after Christ. Possession, protecting the *polis* and its identity and traditions, is no longer the government’s business. “Membership in Christ replaced all other political identities by which communities knew themselves. No respect can be paid to the role of government, then, as a focus of collective identity...”<sup>43</sup> “There remains simply the rump of political authority which cannot be dispensed with yet, the exercise of judgment.”<sup>44</sup> We shall turn to this suggestion later on and attempt to evaluate it. O’Donovan sees this assumption confirmed in Romans 13:1-7 where Paul specifically mentions the judicial functions of political authority. Before the eschatological horizon of Christ’s victory, political authority has only left “the alternatives of subjection and outright confrontation and defeat.”<sup>45</sup> In all this, O’Donovan is careful not to opt for an all too naïve realised eschatology. The basic assertion that the authorities are subjected to Christ must be qualified by a second one that Christ’s sovereignty is not yet visible and uncontested.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.1.3.3 Back to Dual Authority

#### a) The church as the community under Christ’s authority

While the consequence of Christ’s victory is for the political rulers to be cornered and beaten back, the positive embodiment of Christ’s authority is the church as the new society which shows the rule of God as realized. It is the community under the “authority of the risen Christ.”<sup>47</sup> The church is a political society “...not by a special

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<sup>43</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 147.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 146. *Contra* Daniel Carroll, who lodges a complaint that O’Donovan’s “*eschatology offers no sustained exposition of the ‘not yet’ of eschatology*” (M. D. Carroll R., ‘The Power of the Future in the Present’ in Bartholomew-Chaplin- Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 116-143 (123, emphasis original). Similarly Doerksen voices concerns from Yoderian quarters which worry that any talk about obedient rulers might lead to a “immanentization of the future reign of God” (Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 158). This impression springs from O’Donovan’s concern to show how things are not the same anymore after Christ’s resurrection and ascension.

<sup>47</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 123.

function it has to fulfil but by a government that it obeys in everything. It is ruled and authorized by the ascended Christ alone and supremely; it therefore has its own authority and it is not answerable to any other authority that may attempt to subsume it.”<sup>48</sup> Through Pentecost the church is joined with Christ’s authorisation:

“Represented, it is authorized to represent Israel, the people of the Kingdom, possessed of the identity promised to the patriarchs. Participating, it is authorized to be the gathering nations, finding the new world order in the rule of Israel’s God.”<sup>49</sup> Christ’s representative act can be grasped in the four moments of Advent, Passion, Resurrection and Exaltation. The church through the Spirit recapitulates the key moments of the Christ-event: Advent corresponds to Mission; the Passion to Suffering; the Resurrection to Rejoicing in creation’s recovery; Exaltation to spirit-powered modes of speech such as Prayer and Prophecy. These key moments correspond to four “sacramental practices” which give the church its structure and ministries.<sup>50</sup>

#### **b) The Obedience of Rulers**

God’s universal rule through Christ then is directly “visible in the life of the church... but not only there.”<sup>51</sup> The church bears witness to Christ’s Lordship beyond itself, and its mission leads with an inward logic to the conversion of the rulers: “...the nations and rulers of the world were confronted with the rule of God, triumphantly present in a community that owned no other rule.”<sup>52</sup>

This is not an alien feature of the story, as Yoder and Hauerwas would have it,<sup>53</sup> but where it naturally leads. It is the fulfilment of the church’s missionary hope, the vindication of its martyrs. O’Donovan never tires of repeating that the Constantinian turning was no illegitimate bid for power: “Christendom is response to mission... It is constituted not by the church’s seizing alien power, but by alien power’s becoming attentive to the church.”<sup>54</sup> The worldly powers have capitulated.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 159.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. ‘Moments of Recapitulation’ in O’Donovan, *Desire*, 174-192.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>53</sup> For a critique of Yoder cf. *ibid.*, 151-152.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 195.

### c) Dual authority

After such words the reader naturally expects a unitary structure of rule, where Christ rules through some Christian emperor, perhaps even through a member of the Christian clergy. Interestingly though, O'Donovan leads us back to the concept of dual authority. This comes as a surprise after statements such as: "The appearance of true authority in Israel meant the unity of political and religious spheres under the rule of God. Obedience and worship were to be one and the same. But that is to say: The Kingdom was the Lord's! The Two Kingdoms period, in which Temple without power and praetorium without worship coexisted in some kind of parallel, was declared closed."<sup>56</sup> We shall turn to this problem later on in the analysis (2.2.3.2.).

Instead of being *replaced* by the church, political authorities in the messianic age are always *accompanied* by the authority of the church. O'Donovan assures the reader that this time it is a different situation than Israel's sojourn in exile.<sup>57</sup> The church as the new people of God does not need its identity to be preserved by secular authority anymore at all.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand political authority needs the church to be told its identity and, in particular, to be reminded of its defeat.<sup>59</sup>

The dual institutions of church and state are precisely there to keep a basic eschatological tension alive, lest the state feels too complacent or the church gets corrupted.<sup>60</sup> Any "unified political and theological authority other than that which is vested in Christ's own person" must be rejected as the Antichrist's presumptuous claim.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> O'Donovan stresses that the church has first conquered society and then the rulers as a second frontier (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 193). This is perhaps a bit overly idealised, as a great number of 'subjects' only became Christians by following the Emperor's lead.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>58</sup> "Its [the church's] security is guaranteed by the ascended Christ and needs no further underwriting" (ibid., 218). The church does not even seem to need the judging activities of the state – the latter's rump function – because Christians "...have no need for penultimate judgments to defend their rights" (ibid., 151).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>60</sup> It is not the case that "...the eschatological language mysteriously drops out, to be replaced by a functional dialectical between institutional roles" (Kroecker, 'Debate', 58). The dialectical or duality is precisely a consequence of eschatology.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 215. The Antichrist in different ages is always marked by "...the convergence in one subject of claims to earthly political rule and heavenly soteriological mediation" (ibid., 214).

#### d) What was wrong with Christendom

O'Donovan admits critically that immediately after the Constantinian turn, "...the eschatological horizon of all political theology" had, "in the moment of astonishment, come to be spoken of as present."<sup>62</sup> Subsequent generations had to "recover the future horizon... yet in such a way as to acknowledge what had changed."<sup>63</sup> Various ill-conceived developments in the era of Christendom basically have their roots in two frequent mistakes: the first is the reconception of dual authority as the neat dividing of a homogenous society into two spheres of government, which do not interfere with each other, and where the church can no longer fulfil its missionary task of reminding secular powers of their proper place.<sup>64</sup> The second mistake is the overstepping of the state's role as a servant of the church's mission. The "mutual service between the two authorities",<sup>65</sup> which is the positive aspect of the rulers' capitulation before Christ, does not include defending the church and reinforcing its discipline.

In the important chapter 'The obedience of rulers' O'Donovan unfolds how this concept of dual authority was thought through, modified and interpreted during Christendom.<sup>66</sup> O'Donovan is convinced that the Christendom idea is possible without coercion and persecution of dissenters.<sup>67</sup> He seems to have some sort of established church in mind, where the church's access to the rulers is institutionalised. The political authorities privilege the Christian church and its

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<sup>62</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 198.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 199. Statements like this make it clear that O'Donovan does not naively support a Caesaro-Papist caricature of Christendom. "O'Donovan offers no Eusebian brief for Constantinianism" (Kroeker, 'Debate', 50). For a diagnosis of various misguided attempts to conflate the eschatological horizon cf. O'Donovan's important survey of Church history in his chapter 'The obedience of rulers' in O'Donovan, *Desire*, 193-242.

<sup>64</sup> "The peril of the Christendom idea – precisely the same peril that attends upon the post-Christendom idea of the religiously neutral state – was that of negative collusion; the pretence that there was now no further challenge to be issued to the rulers in the name of the ruling Christ" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 213).

O'Donovan criticises, in particular, Yoder's free-church model by suggesting that this ecclesiological model of a 'voluntary society' is actually very conformist, implicitly assuring the state that it has nothing to fear from the church, because the latter is no different from a sports club (ibid., 223-224).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>66</sup> This part of O'Donovan's narrative, however fascinating, will only play a subordinate role in my thesis, which does not primarily assess Christendom. However, it is important to bear in mind how modern theological-political thinking is bound to be shaped by the historical idea of Christendom, even if subconsciously so.

<sup>67</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 212. 218-224. "The idea of a Christian state, then, need not be the idea of a coercive state" (ibid., 224).

mission in such a constitution and are willing to listen. The church's only corresponding service is "to help it [the political authorities] make that act of self-denying recognition."<sup>68</sup> Civil religion is a permanent danger in such an arrangement, though by no means bound up with established churches.

### e) **Political Liberalism as the fruit of Christendom**

At the end of his chapter, O'Donovan ventures to show how political liberalism is the legacy of Christendom. He sketches out a normative political culture which is the *bene esse* that is dependent on the *esse* of political structures, but developed and refined through its contact with the Christian message. Features of this normative culture are, for example, responsible government and the concept of the 'state' itself. The responsible state has its focus in the judicial function and subordinates all other features to this goal. It is "...minimally coercive and minimally representative."<sup>69</sup> But the main achievement of Christian political thinking is that it places all political authority under the law. "The legal-constitutional conception is the essence of Christendom's legacy."<sup>70</sup>

For the purpose of this thesis it is not necessary to give an extended account of O'Donovan's last and important chapter 'The redemption of society', where he discusses in what ways *society* might reflect the rulers' turn to Christ and critiques a number of distortions of the original Christian heritage in the context of postmodernity. I content myself with pointing to O'Donovan's continued emphasis that to exclude the rulers on principle from evangelical obedience is ultimately to deny the Christian hope for the whole of society.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 219.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>71</sup> 'The creed asserts: *cuius regni non erit finis*, and the apostle, that 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow' (Phil.2:10). The First Amendment presumes to add: 'except...' ' (ibid., 246). Skillen rightly asks why the First Amendment could not be seen as the humble acknowledgment by the state that while it recognises and protects the freedom of the church, it cannot join the church in a religious confession (James W. Skillen, 'Acting Politically in Biblical Obedience?' in Bartholomew-Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood ?*, 398-417 (415)).

## 2.2 Analysis

O'Donovan's political vision has something highly satisfactory and fascinating about it. He manages to present a distinctively *Christian* option of political thinking, which is universal in its scope and command, but needs to make no apologies for being rooted in a most particular story. By describing Christ as God's representative, who takes up and transforms Israel's hope and brings to fulfilment God's will for creation, O'Donovan manages to integrate important parts of the biblical narrative. There is a balance of continuity and discontinuity between God's creative and redemptive work in Israel and in Christ.

From this springs a similar balance of affirming and subverting elements in O'Donovan's political thinking. Political theology is more than just a critique of power and more than just a matter of giving a sacred glow to common-sense political thinking. O'Donovan manages to accommodate the fiercest theological challenges to misguided political authority alongside a broad affirmation of appropriate forms. His call for double-discernment, either of Christ or Antichrist, is intriguing and should be a strong safeguard against either the tendency to naively take the historical facts at face value as God's work in history, or to prematurely demonize the major movements of history. Discernment, however hard, is possible because the Christ-story offers a criterion and a direction. However, there are also tensions and lacunae in this elegant architecture.

In the following analytical section I am going to revisit crucial points in O'Donovan's narrative in a more systematic form. I will particularly draw attention to a curious through-going ambiguity in O'Donovan's notion of the political, in his understanding of Christ's Lordship and in the presentation of the church as a political community. We will see that out of this ambiguity arises a very complex understanding of the church's interaction with the state, which is marked by much tension.

## 2.2.1 Political Authority: Definition, Rationale, Scope

### 2.2.1.1 Analysis

O'Donovan's use of 'political' is twofold. On the one hand there is the exercise of power and governance not least by 'temporal means of power' such as means of constraint and enforcement. On the other hand a much broader sense of flourishing communal life under some form of authority is envisaged. In order to understand the relationship between these concepts better we will first explore the reason for the existence of political authority, what it is to achieve and where it has its limits. We will have briefly to investigate whether the broad sense of 'political' is always tied to the narrow sense of 'political' understood as rule by temporal means of power.

#### a) Definition

For O'Donovan, political authority is of supreme importance. The "political act" as "...the innovative moment in which God calls on us to act not only on our own behalf but on behalf of others and in their name"<sup>72</sup> is at the heart and origin of any human sociality and establishes community. If I were to give a definition of O'Donovan's view of political authority, I would say it is the rightfully ordered power which brings to life and nurtures community and moves it on to its final goal. O'Donovan himself defines it as the coming together of "...*power, the execution of right and the perpetuation of tradition... in one coordinated agency.*"<sup>73</sup> This basic *esse* of political authority can be developed into a *bene esse* where the rulers are held accountable to the divine law, perceived either as the Mosaic Torah or natural law. O'Donovan does not pay too much attention to the command of coercive means which are somewhat unavoidable for political authority. Judgment and punishment are affirmed as constructive and necessary tools. But as we shall see in the next section, O'Donovan has a concept of 'authority-that-generates-community' which can do without these conventional political means.

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<sup>72</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 46. Wolterstorff sums up O'Donovan's explanations slightly differently by distinguishing political *rule* (the coming together of power, right and tradition) from political *authority* (the rule authorized by God to mediate God's authority). Cf. Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'A Discussion of Oliver O'Donovan's *The Desire of the Nations*', *SJT* 54 (2001), 87-109 (92).

O'Donovan's notion of political authority is arguably one-sided and overly positive. By concentrating on 'authority' rather than on 'power', O'Donovan deals with regimes which already show a degree of ordered and acknowledged power which is broadly oriented towards a people's welfare.<sup>74</sup> As Aaron Perry has pointed out, there is a certain inclination on O'Donovan's part to see even semi-tyrannical regimes as the result of divine providence as "[b]ehind every historically successful regime, there is the divine regime of history."<sup>75</sup>

## **b) Rationale**

Following Augustine, O'Donovan seems to see political authority rather as God's providential gift by saying that "...only sociality itself was given in creation, all other political structures were given by divine providence."<sup>76</sup> In that sense, political authority was necessitated by the Fall and has a limited character both in purpose and in scope.<sup>77</sup> Still, O'Donovan concentrates on the God-given aspect of political authority, not on the dire circumstances that made it necessary. It is God's gracious gift, something communities cannot give themselves; they can only discover and gratefully acknowledge it.<sup>78</sup> The God-given authority avoids both the pitfalls of autonomy (the individual merely broadcasts his or her own concerns to the communal level) and of alienation (individuals have to submit to rules they did not

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<sup>74</sup> I certainly cannot detect 'the demonic character of secular authorities' in O'Donovan's text, as Daniel Carroll describes it (Carroll, 'Future', 125).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. A. Perry, 'On Enduring Political Authority: Comparing Oliver O'Donovan and the Book of Revelation', *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 12 (2007) 37-64, cf. esp. 37-42 where O'Donovan confirms this impression.

<sup>76</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 14.

<sup>77</sup> This is confirmed by David McIlroy who distinguishes O'Donovan's view from an Aristotelian one with its assumption that human beings are naturally 'political animals'. "For O'Donovan, following Augustine, government, at least as we know it today, is necessitated by the Fall and is a response to the Fall." D. McIlroy, 'The Right Reason for Caesar to Confess Christ as Lord: Oliver O'Donovan and Arguments for the Christian State', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23 (2010) 300-315 (313). Jonathan Chaplin, too, writes that "...it is essential to note that he [O'Donovan] subscribes to the patristic notion, most fully articulated by Augustine and continued by Luther, of government as a post-lapsarian, remedial institution providentially established by God to curb human sinfulness and enforce a measure of 'earthly' justice until the return of Christ..." (J. Chaplin, 'Political Eschatology and Responsible Government' in Bartholomew-Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 265-308 (276).

<sup>78</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 31.



make). If God himself is king then human beings are done full justice by their creator, yet led on beyond the status quo to their true fulfilment.<sup>79</sup>

### c) Scope

O'Donovan makes a distinction between human political rule and a fully politicized community under God's rule: "Society and rulers have different destinies: the former is to be transformed, shaped in conformity to God's purpose; the latter are to disappear, renouncing their sovereignty in the face of his."<sup>80</sup> Political authority has something temporal and something destined for eternity at the same time. Human rulers as we have them now are "...to disappear, renouncing their sovereignty in the face of his [Christ's]."<sup>81</sup> Still, salvation history heads towards the new city, the New Jerusalem, not back to the Garden of Eden. The political aspect of human fellowship, the ordered life under an authorized rule, seems to be among the things which are redeemed and transformed and not among the things that pass away. The hope of the people of God is fully political, expressed in the city of God coming from heaven, where God will rule over his own for ever.<sup>82</sup> Maybe it could be argued that the temporal rulers preserve society for this final destiny.

## 2.2.1.2 Critique

### a) The discovery of political authority

O'Donovan tells the story of how true political concepts were revealed in Israel as part of Israel's salvation history. God simultaneously revealed his kingship and normative structures of political authority: "For in the church's understanding Israel's political categories were the paradigm for all others."<sup>83</sup> O'Donovan is remarkably silent about the political experiences of peoples outside ancient Israel or the Christian West. He affirms that "divine providence is ready to protect other

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<sup>79</sup> "Hence the alien-familiar character of YHWH's command: the purpose it expressed was not their purpose, but it was a purpose that corresponded to the *telos* of their own beings" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 32).

<sup>80</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 193. Chaplin emphasizes that according to O'Donovan, "Christ... will usher in a new, heavenly order of peace and harmony in which political authority will be redundant and so pass away" (Chaplin, 'Eschatology', 277).

<sup>81</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 193.

<sup>82</sup> O'Donovan draws attention to this when discussing the book of Revelation (*ibid.*, 153-157).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

national traditions besides the sacred one”<sup>84</sup> and that “the political structures of other nations had the same vocation to exercise just judgment as Israel’s did.”<sup>85</sup> Foreign powers (from the perspective of Israel) come into focus mostly as Imperial and therefore dehumanized, because they destroy the local identity of nations.

O’Donovan wants, of course, to give an account of Western European democracies and show their indebtedness to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and therefore legitimately concentrates on the trajectory from YHWH’s kingship in Israel to Christ’s rule in the church and on to the modern liberal state.

The question remains how and whether political concepts can be discovered apart from the unique realm of salvation history. If they can – and after all there are plenty of nations and peoples who unite power, judgment and tradition in one coordinated agency – it is unclear, whether they rely on the mediating services of Israel and/or the church in their discovery.<sup>86</sup>

As we have seen before, O’Donovan wants to underline both the exclusive *and* paradigmatic character of Israel’s existence. Israel is not just a unique actor in history but discloses what is universally true to the nations.<sup>87</sup> However, in a sense, it seems to be possible for other nations to discern through reason what Israel learnt through revelation.<sup>88</sup>

Wolterstorff argues convincingly that the conclusion about a paradigmatic character of Israel’s political existence is far from evident from the biblical texts. “Perhaps

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<sup>84</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 73.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Chaplin remarks critically that O’Donovan could present earlier on his definition of the political *esse* as the coordinated agency of might, tradition and right, without any recourse to biblical exegesis; “...the apparently ‘free-standing’ nature of the account of political authority in *RMO* [*Resurrection and Moral Order*] does at least evoke the question of whether this account is *derived* from biblical exegesis or rather *brought to it*” (Chaplin, ‘Eschatology’, 298).

<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, O’Donovan has derived generalized theorems from Israel’s experience of the divine rule. On the other hand, this is always embedded in the witness of Israel’s history. “...political theology must go beyond such general conceptions, and take on the character of a proclamatory history, attesting the claim that YHWH reigns” (O’Donovan, *Desire*, 81).

<sup>88</sup> This complexity is helpfully unpacked and ‘labelled’ by William Schweiker who writes that, “O’Donovan seems to join a tradition of Anglican reflection... that links claims about God’s covenantal and salvific will to a kind of natural law argument.” By embarking on this “middle path between Protestant covenantalism and Roman Catholic moral and political thought”, O’Donovan finds a way – especially in the light of the resurrection – “to link creation and Kingdom as the moral order of life” (William Schweiker, ‘Freedom and Authority in Political Theology: A Response to Oliver O’Donovan’s *The Desire of the Nations*’, *SJT* 54 (2001) 110-126 [114, 115]).

YHWH's kingly activities within Israel were understood by Israel to be, and were in fact, not the *norm* for kingship generally – whether of YHWH or others – but an *exception*, grounded in God's exceptional covenant with Israel.”<sup>89</sup>

Maybe it would be more helpful to say that Israel shares in the universal political experience as far as the *esse* is concerned: Israel's political institutions coordinated power, right and tradition just as the Philistines and the Assyrians did. This does not mean that they did so in exactly the same way and with the same rationale. Israel already represents the *bene esse* of political authority, which is discovered as part of a liberating history, as being put under the law and safeguarded by the voice of the prophets. In order to share in this *bene esse*, it is necessary to enter the unique story of being ruled by the God of Israel.<sup>90</sup>

## 2.2.2 Christ's Lordship: Rationale, Character, Scope

### 2.2.2.1 Analysis

Political authority is essential for the generating of communities. We could say that the political understood as authority sponsors the political understood as human sociality. We have seen that O'Donovan in all his hearty endorsement of political authority also shows a hesitant trait, which does not want to affirm political authorities as something that existed prior to the fall and which will endure past God's eschatological consummation. At the very least political authority must be greatly transformed in that consummation. It is clear that the nature of Christ's authority is crucial in these reflections. Does Christ display an altogether different form of political authority? Does he offer the transformed form of political authority? And if so, how can this authority be mediated so as to sponsor ultimately flourishing communities?

In the following sections I will turn to these questions.

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<sup>89</sup> Wolterstorff, 'Discussion', 101.

<sup>90</sup> At one stage, O'Donovan develops the thought that Israel shares its unique story with other people, not by way of expanding its rule, but by way of teaching the nations its law (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 66ff. and 72).

**a)      Rationale**

Jesus Christ proclaims, mediates and represents God's kingship over Israel and the entire world. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God, the unhindered, undivided rule of Israel's God over its people. The church proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord of all, seated at God's right hand. O'Donovan ties these aspects closely together. A 'Jesuology' which only pays attention to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom is forced to see Jesus as a failed prophet. Only orthodox Christology gives full credit to Jesus' royal claims and full vindication to his preaching of the Kingdom. In Christ's death and resurrection-vindication, Israel and all of humanity have been judged and vindicated and put under one true Lord.

**b)      Character**

In his earthly ministry, Jesus embodies all the features of Israel's God and king: he delivers, judges and owns. But he does so in strikingly unpolitical terms. He neither uses force nor holds political office nor forcefully resists the existing political arrangement. O'Donovan emphasizes that Jesus' seemingly unpolitical ministry still had political consequences. There is empowerment for the exhausted subjects of foreign rule. But then again, there seem to be no overt political consequences derived from this empowerment.

Christ's political authority is clearly not like any other political authority. This becomes very obvious when O'Donovan turns to the dialogue between Pilate and Christ in John's Gospel (John 18:33-38), where Christ's authority is seen as based upon truth.<sup>91</sup> This truth creates a new community by symbolically re-enacting Israel in the Twelve and by gathering the crowds. We shall turn to this aspect in the next section 2.2.2.2. Christ has full authority of word and deed<sup>92</sup> but has no need of any political means in the traditional sense. The resurrection vindicates creation rather than Jesus' specific non-conformist values.<sup>93</sup> After his exaltation Christ's lordship is

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<sup>91</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>93</sup> A point critically raised by P. Doerksen, 'Christology in the Political Theology of Oliver O'Donovan', *MQR* 78.3 (2004), 433-447. For O'Donovan's drawing together of Christ's resurrection and the affirming of creation, including moral structures that are inherent in the latter, cf. O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1994).

universal and fully real, even ‘public’ in a sense, but is at the same time a hidden reality which awaits full disclosure.

**c) Scope**

From the above section it becomes clear that Christ’s lordship has no limits. The church’s mission must be understood as an attempt to elicit growing acknowledgment of Christ’s lordship until it is fully visible and uncontested.

### **2.2.2.2 Critique**

We have seen that Christ’s Lordship or Christ’s Kingship are central notions for O’Donovan’s political narrative. In the following critique I will draw attention to two problematic aspects or tensions of this notion within O’Donovan’s tale.

**a) Between metaphor and reality: The king who never was a king**

In Israel’s case the metaphor of God’s rule is intimately linked to the world of real politics. God’s rule, though never totally identified with concrete political institutions, can nevertheless be mediated and reflected in Israel’s political institutions.

Therefore Israel’s conquest by foreign imperial powers strikes at the heart of Israel’s religious identity. The wounds of conquest and exile are kept open, the people of Israel rightly await a new revelation of God’s kingship. The return to the land is a step in the right direction, but the existence of Israel under various superpowers is still far from their proud and dignified existence as God’s own people.

O’Donovan rightly stresses the omnipresent royal imagery, speech and hope which surround Jesus in the New Testament. But then again, Jesus seems to be the king who never really was a king. On the level of plain historical facts he fulfilled none of the hopes for a Davidic prince. This observation, though hardly new or original, must be duly considered. The royal imagery is obviously not discarded, but instead

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postponed (one day Christ will rule) as well as transformed into a spiritual or ecclesial key.

O'Donovan duly notices these movements and accounts for them both by stressing the unfulfilled postponement before the eschatological horizon and transformation into an ecclesial key. However, he is equally emphatic that the initial, fully political meaning of the imagery of divine rule, has its full bearing. In this strand of his thinking there is a lot of continuity between God's rule as king in Israel and Jesus' proclamation. Christ joins together what was wrongly separated: the world of politics and religion. Jesus explicitly challenges the arrangement of the two rules, and in this role he is the direct rival of the people of his day who hold political office. It is only thanks to his conviction of the impending rule of God that Jesus treats the rulers casually rather than with hostility. The calling of Israel to be God's special nation is restored by Jesus' symbolic gathering of the Twelve. The fact that Jesus has, strictly speaking, no political authority, in the sense that he holds an office or commands political means of power, sits uneasily with this vision.

O'Donovan never makes it quite clear why the intense and concrete political hope which connects so well with Israel's true calling according to his narrative, is suddenly abandoned, or at least greatly delayed, after Easter day. After all, the resurrection-exaltation confirms and vindicates the royal claims of Jesus. Why is the church not permitted to found tribes, nations and cities under Christ's rule, perhaps on behalf of Israel or as satellite states of Israel? To explain the new dual arrangement with the eschatological tension makes good sense, but it remains a puzzle why the risen Christ completely reverses the aspirations of the earthly Jesus to bring back together in one the religious and political realm. Why is the pulling together of heavenly salvation and earthly politics in one agency a dangerous game in the age of the church, while it was a much more fitting scenario for Ancient Israel?<sup>94</sup> Somewhere there is an immense tension between the literal level of the royal imagery granted to Christ and the spiritual level into which this imagery is transformed: because Jesus is King he does not want to share his comprehensive

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<sup>94</sup> Schweiker is certainly right in pointing out that Israel "increasingly comes to see that no one – not the King or Israel – can represent God's authority – God's rule – in its totality" (Schweiker, 'Freedom', 118) and hence there is a development of various offices. But the problem persists.

spiritual-political rule with anybody else. Because Jesus is God's anointed King he will put an end to the separation between the political and religious. But because Jesus is not quite a king like any other king, he will not rule in the fashion of the kings nor will he have his rule mediated by an earthly 'king'. As a consequence, there is a clear distinction between the religious and the political.

What then about positing Christ's political authority as altogether different from any earthly one? O'Donovan recognizes that Christ's kingship has something disturbing and subverting for the concept of kingship as people know it, even as it is known in Israel.

He devotes some space to Jesus' refashioning of authority by dealing with Mk 10:42ff. and parallels: "Jesus' response makes a general contrast between authority as commonly understood and the authority exercised among his disciples."<sup>95</sup>

But on the whole, O'Donovan is convinced that the continuity is greater than the discontinuity. The 'like' is more powerful than the 'unlike' between God's kingship or Christ's Lordship and political rule. Consequently, the lordship of Christ is bound to reach out to, and engage with, the rulers of this world, realigning all of political authority with his ultimate revelation of God's rule. Politics can therefore still, "serve as a source of religious imagery, part of that broken glass, whose reflection the soul transcends as it moves on and up to divine glory."<sup>96</sup> There is still a real analogy – beyond a metaphor or poetic image – "between the acts of God and human acts, both of them taking place within the one public history which is the theatre of God's saving purposes and mankind's social undertakings."<sup>97</sup>

#### **b) Conscious confrontation or tacit re-definition?**

Christ's authority directly affects the rulers of this world. The Christ-event ushers in a new era for political rule.<sup>98</sup> O'Donovan uses the dramatic language of apocalyptic to show how the authority of the risen Christ corners and targets worldly rulers: "In the Christian era there is no neutral performance on the part of rulers; either they accommodate to the energy of the divine mission, or they hurl themselves into

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<sup>95</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 106.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Chaplin captures this real change in the expression '*dispensationalist political eschatology*' (Chaplin, 'Eschatology', 277, emphasis original).

defiance.”<sup>99</sup> This clearly implies a *conscious* confrontation with the message of the Gospel. O’Donovan often confirms this; mission understood as proclamation, of letting the powers know what has happened in Christ, is vital. O’Donovan equally stresses that the church must make this ongoing proclamation – without the religious roots the proposals of liberal secularism become unintelligible.<sup>100</sup> There seems to be no neutral ground for, and no ‘anonymous obedience’ to, the rulers. McIlroy puts it succinctly: “O’Donovan is a proponent of the Christian state because he declares the non-confessional state to be guilty of committing a cardinal error, of participating in humanity’s rebellion against the authority of the ascended Christ, if not of succumbing to idolatry.”<sup>101</sup> It seems that even the *esse* of a fully developed political agency stands condemned in the age of the church and has to be exchanged for a modest state, which willingly accepts its conquest by Christ. However, various voices in the New Testament seem to contradict this view. In particular Paul’s view of the authorities in Rom 13:1-7 seems to be confident that they can do ‘the good’ as the servants of God in all their pagan ambiguity. O’Donovan recognizes the problem and adds that, “The church’s knowledge that its mission could be assisted by the Roman Empire did not begin with the conversion of Constantine; nor was the early church unwilling to recognize a measure of ‘anonymous Christianity’ in such quarters, too.”<sup>102</sup> He, however, quickly adds that, “...beyond that, however, there may be a conscious facilitation, based on the recognition of the church and acknowledgment of its mission.”<sup>103</sup> This is a suggestion that the political powers can move from good to better by acknowledging Christ. However, this suggestion is a faint echo of the dramatic choice between surrender and open war that the authorities supposedly face after Christ. If the authorities are described as already relegated by Christ’s victory (according to O’Donovan’s interpretation of Rom 13:1-7), the question arises why it is still necessary to confront them in mission and win them over as Christ’s conquered slaves.

Do we talk about an absolutely crucial act of confrontation and a changed self-perception of the political authorities, or do we talk about a tacit relegation made by

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<sup>99</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 217.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>101</sup> McIlroy, ‘Right Reason’, 308.

<sup>102</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 217.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.



the church without Caesar's knowledge? If the first is true, it is hard to find anything good at all in a ruler who did not yet positively respond to the Gospel. If the second is true, we have to think again about the rationale for ongoing mission which reaches out, to include the rulers of this world in the evangelical proclamation.

## 2.2.3 The Church as a Political Society

### 2.2.3.1 Analysis

If political societies or communities are sponsored by political authority the church is the political society *par excellence* put under the authority of God's final King.

However, as we have seen O'Donovan will not apply the metaphor of Christ's Lordship in an unbroken and straightforward fashion to be mirrored in the world of politics. Christ is and is not a king, he both interacts with and transcends notions of earthly rule. In this section we will show how this 'like-unlike' tension is going to affect O'Donovan's understanding of the church. In what sense is the church a political community, free and independent, in what sense is it only symbolically so and in need of political structures outside itself, despite its socio-political nature?

The authority of Christ generates a community which is the church. "Political theology has an ecclesiological mode, which takes the church seriously as a society and shows how the rule of God is realised there."<sup>104</sup>

This community shares in many ways in the eschatological age, and reflects the decisive deed of God in Christ. It is, for instance, the community that 'judges not' because it knows that decisive judgment has been rendered. It is the community that practices generous forgiveness and mercy: "God's coming judgment will give us more than our entitlement if we are the meek who inherit the earth; so we may be generous to those who exploit us."<sup>105</sup> Christ's rule is reflected but not directly mediated, neither through church office nor through a political ruler.<sup>106</sup> The church is

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<sup>104</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 123.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 112. In his account of Jesus' ministry, O'Donovan comes remarkably close to a lot of Yoder's concerns.

<sup>106</sup> Pace Kroeker: "The church is a kind of political community... in mediating and representing God's rule on earth" (Kroeker, 'Debate', 51). O'Donovan would not subscribe to this. Kroeker is

and is not a political entity. It is 'political' insofar as it is under authority and has a distinctive social shape. It is political insofar as it is oriented towards the political rulers and does not leave them alone. On the other hand, it does not become the new Israel in the sense of a politically constituted nation: "...we assert that the political character of the church, its essential nature as a governed society, is hidden, to be discerned by faith as the ascended Christ who governs it is to be discerned by faith."<sup>107</sup> Nor does it become a self-contained state within a state which has no need of other political institutions (we could perhaps imagine this as a free city within a country which completely follows internal community rules). O'Donovan calls the church a political community but also emphasizes that the church never attempts to take over or replace Israel or the 'worldly cities' by becoming fully politicized. The case of Israel has been dealt with earlier on.<sup>108</sup> Concerning the 'earthly city', O'Donovan makes the interesting observation that in Revelation, the 'Great City' and the 'Holy City' constantly fuse: "Three political communities, ancient Israel, the pagan empire and the eschatological church, are being drawn together in a startling identification."<sup>109</sup> He concludes that, "...the reason why John of Patmos will not allow the church a distinct social presence is that its witnesses claim back the Great City to become the Holy City."<sup>110</sup>

The church must remain "politically underdressed."<sup>111</sup> It must not realize a full political identity set apart from the existing political rulers and structures, leaving the former behind. At the same time it has to kindle the hope for a 'new Jerusalem' under the visible ruler Christ.

This last thought explains why the church has to address the state in its mission: political rule as such has to be claimed for the victory of Christ, and must, in its own way, point to the eschatological fulfilment it awaits together with the church. The state however is even less permitted than the church to mediate the eschatological

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however very right in asking: "What exactly does it mean to say that secular authorities mediate 'only' God's judgments, and not God's rule?" (Kroeker, 'Debate', 52).

<sup>107</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 166.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. no. 37, p.8 in this thesis.

<sup>109</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 156.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

rule of Christ.<sup>112</sup> Again, O'Donovan seems to picture political structures on various levels: there is the providentially given *esse* of political authority; there is the qualified form of a liberal state, the *bene esse* which is the product of the state who hears the church's witness of Christ's victory; and there is the 'new Jerusalem', where somehow Israel, the state and the church converge in the perfect eschatological reality.<sup>113</sup> At present the state is not permitted to become the eternal city, and the church is not permitted to become a fully developed earthly city.

The church is the liberated community under ultimate authority, reflecting this authority directly in its practices without becoming an independent political structure, but with the noble task of calling political authority to indirect obedience to Christ.

### 2.2.3.2 Critique:

#### a) **Minimal state or maximal state. Or: The hope that is not allowed to deliver**

O'Donovan is convinced that calling the rulers to 'evangelical obedience' is within the scope of the church's mission itself. Nothing can go unchallenged and unchanged under the horizon of Christ's victory: "Theology must be political if it is to be evangelical. Rule out the political questions and you cut short the proclamation of God's saving power; you leave people enslaved where they ought to be set free from sin – their own sin and others."<sup>114</sup> O'Donovan senses well the thrust in the Christian faith which aims at the expansion of Christ's reign: "He must reign until everything is put under his feet" (1 Cor 15:25). He rightly asks why, of all things, political actors should be spared Christ's challenge. However, the surprise is that Christ does not

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<sup>112</sup> O'Donovan's thinking is complex on this point. Chaplin's reading of O'Donovan suggests that "...a vital part of the task of the church now is to proclaim anew the legitimate function of political authority as mediating the authority of God" (Chaplin, 'Eschatology' 269). While this is not wrong, I find 'mediating' a problematic term. Authority is still from God and somehow reflected by political rulers, but the church's task is precisely to tell the rulers that their role is curbed in the light of *Christ's* rule.

<sup>113</sup> I agree both with Daniel Carroll who points out that O'Donovan merely alludes to the eschatological consummation in the 'jargon of the text' without expounding what it might contain (Carroll, 'Future', 123), and with O'Donovan's response that "an apophatic element... is... inescapable" when talking about eschatological consummation (O. O'Donovan, 'Response to Daniel Carroll R.' in Bartholomew-Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 144-146 [145]).

<sup>114</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 3. "Justice is to have a new, evangelical content" (ibid., 201).

seem to wish to rule *through* the political rulers. As we have seen they are pushed back and given a Christologically defined space. A ‘mini-state’ is the consequence.<sup>115</sup> The revelation of kingship made to Israel is not fully mediated via the church to the pagan rulers, but seems to be greatly diminished. The thought of a ‘rump-state’ which is just busy with giving judgment is only convincing at first glance. On second thoughts, it also looks slightly arbitrary. It is not obvious why a Christologically tempered state should embody this, rather than that feature of the triad of political *esse*. A state which solely judges but has no business in “protecting the polis and its identity”<sup>116</sup> seems to be hardly feasible at all. O’Donovan addresses the second question later on and modifies his ‘judgment-only-state’ model.<sup>117</sup> Of course, the other aspects are there, too, but they are subordinated to the activity of judgment. But the first question remains unresolved. Why this, and not that? If the new community of the church overturns all given community identities and their political defence, one could equally argue that the decisive judgment in the Christ-event makes all judgment obsolete. If somebody answered by saying that, though the church has no need of judgment anymore, the world does, the argument could be turned around by saying that, though the church has no need of community identity anymore (in the sense of a national state for instance), the world still has. If the rulers are allowed and commissioned to keep a functioning social space in order to facilitate the church’s mission, this might well include the defence of the *polis* as part of this social space with all its features, including warfare, coercion and representation. Again, O’Donovan would argue that they are legitimately there but

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<sup>115</sup> Luke Bretherton’s summary is potentially misleading: “For O’Donovan, the shape of the political and social order that has genuinely bowed the knee to Christ should correspond to the shape of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, thus it will have an ‘evangelical shape’ ” (L. Bretherton, ‘Introduction: Oliver O’Donovan’s Political Theology and the Liberal Imperative’ *Political Theology* 9 (2008), 265-271 [269]), though the expression ‘evangelical shape’ is O’Donovan’s own expression (cf. no. 114). It is important to see, however, that the state is often not called to correspond in any sort of *positive* way to the Gospel, but rather, to give way and respond in a negative, self-diminishing fashion. O’Donovan, conversing with Gerrit de Kruijf, underlines this point: “There is, of course, an evangelization of political order that I would repudiate... The state, in my view, remains under the direction of the First Person of the Trinity; it is not filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; but it attests, negatively and by the yielding up of its powers the fulfilment of the Father’s purpose in the Son” (O. O’Donovan, ‘Response to Gerrit de Kruijf’ Bartholemew –Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 238-240 [239]).

<sup>116</sup> O’Donovan, *Desire*, 147.

<sup>117</sup> Most clearly *ibid.*, 233f.

only in a minimal form.<sup>118</sup> The privileging of the activity of judgment still looks odd, though. It looks as if Christ hands over one third of his rule (judgment) to political authorities and keeps the other two (salvation and possession) firmly to himself. Perhaps it would be more helpful to say that all three aspects of rule *are* embodied by any political authority, but have been radically cut down to very modest auxiliary functions, against all autonomous and absolutizing tendencies, by the Christ event. In this case, they could be affirmed as relative and temporary goods, qualified, limited and, in the end, disposed of by Christ.

As we have stated above, there is something strange in the political restraint of the church, and in the theological restraint of the state. On the one hand, O'Donovan's critique of political Messianism is impressive and his case for a faith-sponsored secular state powerful.<sup>119</sup> It remains far from obvious though, from within O'Donovan's narrative, why the eschatological hope for the 'Holy City' is not permitted to deliver here and now, not even in a fragmentary and provisional way. It is not totally understandable why the rulers which turn to Christ are emphatically hindered from ruling on behalf of Christ. If the latter is a forbidden eschatological fruit, one wonders why the rulers should be targeted *qua* rulers at all? Why should the church hope and pray for their obedience?

The rump-state idea of O'Donovan has drawn a lot of criticism from fellow ethicists. Nicholas Wolterstorff finds the list of three functions wanting and suggests adding 'shalom', the facilitating of human flourishing and welfare by the state. To cut back the state to one function will not fully ban the risk of political authorities going wrong: "States are dangerous."<sup>120</sup> The Christ-event is not meant to reauthorize this or that institution (and anyway, why reauthorize the state and not, say, the family, asks

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<sup>118</sup> McIlroy points out the tension between this postulate for the 'obedient ruler' to be minimally representative and O'Donovan's conviction elsewhere that a Christian ruler is justified as the one representing a Christian society: "In O'Donovan's thought, the godly prince is not just a blessing to the nation which he governs, but may be the embodiment of that nation's choice to serve the one true God" (McIlroy, 'Right Reason', 305).

<sup>119</sup> "The most truly Christian state understands itself most thoroughly as 'secular'. It makes the confession of Christ's victory and accepts the relegation of its own authority" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 219). "Secularity is irreducibly an eschatological notion; it requires an eschatological faith to sustain it, a belief in a disclosure that is 'not yet'..." (O. O'Donovan, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 24.

<sup>120</sup> Wolterstorff, 'Discussion', 108.

Wolterstorff)<sup>121</sup> but to heal their malformations. The inauguration of the church, therefore, does not change anything about the providential state: “Christ is not beating the state back to the margins of human existence; the state is not waning. It remains what it has always been: an indispensable component of God’s providential care for humanity.”<sup>122</sup>

Jonathan Chaplin similarly formulates that “...[t]he political consequence of *Christus Victor* is then not primarily the *defeat and displacement* of political authority, but its *rehabilitation* as a created, fallen, judged, but now redeemable, social good. Political authorities are not then ‘thrust back by Christ’s victory to the margins’, but, simply, *put in their proper, creational place...*”<sup>123</sup> Political theology, Chaplin argues, “should not be ‘dispensational’, but simply ‘restorative’...”<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, James Skillen argues for a modest state (not a theocracy) which does its god-given task in a restored and partially redeemed fashion, thanks to the repentance and faith of rulers. He insists that Christ judges and redeems *all* human institutions: “All human authority is given by God; all of it can be twisted by sinful disobedience; all of it is being judged and redeemed in Christ.”<sup>125</sup>

I think all these problems point to some overly complex or unclear lines in the trajectory ‘Israel-Jesus-Church-Nations’, which is the reason why I include this section after dealing with the church as a political society. Coming from Israel’s normative concepts, we naturally expect a trajectory that directly mediates these concepts to all the rulers via the preaching of the church. We also might assume that these true concepts were perhaps unknown to any other nation. But then, connected to the thought of the revelation of God’s kingship in Israel is a second story of a

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<sup>121</sup> Wolterstorff, ‘Discussion’, 102.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>123</sup> Chaplin, ‘Eschatology’, 302 and 303 (emphasis original). Chaplin assumes that O’Donovan is not altogether ready to make this move because political authority, especially justice understood as remedial and corrective, is not part of the created order (which is vindicated by Christ’s resurrection according to O’Donovan), but of God’s providential ordering which might indeed be confronted and relegated by God’s redemptive work (Chaplin, ‘Eschatology’, 303, no 147). Chaplin makes the helpful suggestion that the need for, and the concept of justice is itself “implanted in our created nature” if the act of (corrective) judging is to be meaningful at all. It is only “the employment of coercive means (the ‘sword’)” which arises from the Fall and is God’s providential ordering (ibid., 303).

<sup>124</sup> Chaplin, ‘Eschatology’, 304.

<sup>125</sup> Skillen, ‘Acting Politically’, 413.

distorted form of imperial political authority. Christ attacks it and overturns it. However, he does not primarily dispose of it as it manifests itself in the shape of Israel's illegitimate overlords. Instead he seems to find fault with the latter for displaying exactly the same concepts that Israel knew through its salvation history. It comes as some surprise that the rulers are chided for embodying all three aspects, which were earlier on approved of as true political concepts. It is because of this complexity of trajectory that the rulers and governments which matured to the *bene esse* of political authority under the guidance of the church, are sometimes characterized as a rump form of the *esse*, sometimes as directly and fully translating Israel's insight (government under law), and sometimes as mirroring faintly but directly Christian values (judgment tempered by mercy).<sup>126</sup>

Though some of the resulting conclusions are impressive, the logic within the narrative is not totally convincing.<sup>127</sup> The tale O'Donovan tells us could easily take a different twist that would be no less logically convincing than his present account. It is interesting to see that O'Donovan himself moves on quite quickly from his own initially very negative account of Christ's re-ordination of political rulers. Despite all this, rulers are to be respected and supported.<sup>128</sup>

They are not just being acted upon, bearing indirect witness to Christ's victory, but they mediate quite a lot of God's positive design for political authority: the submission under divine law, the merciful judgment, the appreciation for diversity, including national identities (which were supposedly made obsolete by the multinational community of the church), are only a few examples.<sup>129</sup> This sounds rather close to a Puritan vision of a godly commonwealth, where the state is

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<sup>126</sup> O'Donovan shifts from the language of Christ conquering, relegating and defeating the powers, to a transformation of them which ties in better with his desire to show a development from the God-given 'Good' to the Spirit-inspired 'Better'. "It [the liberal achievement] presupposes original political authority, on the one hand, and proclaims the transformation of it wrought by Christ's Spirit on the other" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 229).

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan Chaplin expresses a similar unease when he complains that O'Donovan's "...exclusively ecclesiocentric legitimization of government seems to conflict with his view, noted earlier, that political authority has a universally valid *esse* which existed prior to, and *is not suspended by*, the triumph of Christ" (Chaplin, 'Eschatology', 279, emphasis original).

<sup>128</sup> Christians have to "defend their provisional role against a premature enthusiasm for dismissing them" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 249).

<sup>129</sup> Wolterstorff draws particular attention to the last example and states that "he [O'Donovan] displays a great deal of sensitivity to the importance of a variety of social affinities and identities for human flourishing" (Wolterstorff, 'Discussion', 104).

consciously and directly enlisted to further God's will in society. Is O'Donovan quietly moving from the minimum to the maximum state here?<sup>130</sup>

## **2.2.4 The Interaction of Church and State in the Eschatological Age**

### **2.2.4.1 Analysis**

After discussing O'Donovan's notions of political authority in general, of Christ's authority and of the church as a political community I will sketch out O'Donovan's vision of the interaction of church and state in the eschatological age. Once again, the summary is followed by two critical observations.

For clarification's sake, I want to reiterate how the state is supposed to answer to the church's witness. On the one hand, the response is to be negative: the rulers let go, declare themselves defeated, and withdraw to a minimum function of upholding judgment. Facing the church as salvific community, political authorities give up any salvific claims and make space for a modest, secular self-understanding. On the other hand secular does not mean religiously neutral. The state that has been reached by the missionary proclamation of the church, gives the church a privileged position in its midst.

But then this negative paradigm is complemented or rather superseded, by a positive aspect: the state which was tamed by Christ is called to mature into a state under the law (not under church law, it has to be noted), taking its cue from Ancient Israel. In addition, the dialectical partnership with the church is to leave its mark on the state, too: judgment is to be tempered with mercy, and free deliberation for the common good is to be encouraged.

The state's obligation towards the church is expressed through privileging and supporting its mission. The church's obligation towards the state is its relentless witness to the Gospel through its distinctive existence and through its message.

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<sup>130</sup> Note that O'Donovan in some places emphatically advocates a broad notion of the political good from a Christian perspective: "Our notions of the public and political may be made wider and more generous. That is what a political theology shaped by the Christ-event must undertake" (O'Donovan, *Desire*, 122).



### 2.2.4.2 Critique

#### a) What obedience?

One question concerns the *how* of the state's obedience. The phrase 'obedience of rulers' suggests a conversion of people, not of institutions. The impact of such a conversion may well deeply affect the institutions that are related to the people converted, and can certainly have an abiding trans-personal impact on a culture, but the religious commitment of rulers can change. The secular, minimal state, even if it is sponsored by Christianity, makes room for secular rulers or rulers from other faiths.

This may or may not be a problem. If the root of the secular state is in an un-coerced religious commitment of people, it is a rather fluid system. It can change in every generation. It can develop well beyond its original roots. If the rulers are not self-confessed Christians, it is hard to see why they should accept a definition of the state that is dictated to them by the church. They may accept that Christianity had a fair share in the historical development of the liberal democracy, but they probably want to find their own reasons for affirming that political system, or they may want to change it for some reason. O'Donovan affirms that the obedience of rulers is the result of the mission of the church which must never be seen as completed, and which cannot ever be taken for granted. At the same time, he is reluctant to keep the political system open to change, dependent on the missionary success of the church in every generation.<sup>131</sup> Too much seems to be at stake. Despite the cautious wording, he clearly favours a Christian state, where the Christian witness is constitutionally entrenched and its representatives (presumably the bishops of the Anglican church) are given an institutionalized hearing: "Imagine a state that gave entrenched, constitutional encouragement to Christian mission not afforded to other religions' beliefs, and expected of its office-holders deference to these arrangements as to constitutional law."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Chaplin points out that O'Donovan's assertion that a Christian state is subject to possible future reform is somewhat in tension with the idea of a constitutionally entrenched Christian mission (Chaplin, 'Eschatology', 288-289).

<sup>132</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 224.

This may make sense as long as a society is still broadly self-defined as Christian.<sup>133</sup> It can explicate the political consequences of the Gospel at a public level.<sup>134</sup> But it cannot safeguard the Christian identity either of politics or of a whole society.

**b) What service?**

But let us assume for a moment that the rulers have been convinced by the Church's mission and have become obedient. It is still an open question what this obedience entails. They obviously are church members now. This, however, does not seem to prevent them from holding offices as rulers, generals, judges and executioners. They are not compelled to follow a high ideal of Christian discipleship imitating the pattern of the cross, as Yoder would have it. The normal and often cruel business of political authorities is not forbidden but merely tempered by their membership of the church. The business of rule is put into perspective under an eschatological horizon and by holding the rulers accountable to God's law. Rulers have to heed their ecclesial tutors both by learning what is good and by being sharply criticized for doing bad. If this happens, we may presume that it is a blessing for entire peoples, and that the church has successfully broadened its influence far beyond the personal level in a most positive way. Surely, it will be easier for the church to live in such a commonwealth it helped to shape itself: the ethics of the church and the ethics of wider society are closer together; there is less tension; there are hopefully no idolatrous claims of a government which bring the church into conflict with it.

But the question remains in what way the church precisely needs the state "... to facilitate its mission."<sup>135</sup>

It is one thing to say that the conversion of rulers is within the scope of Christian mission, and another to claim that governments can support that mission. According to O'Donovan, to live in a Christian state or society does nothing to enhance the political identity of the church. The church is already the self-possessed, judged, redeemed and ruled over people of God. Nor does the church want the authorities to

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. McIlroy, 'Right Reason', 304-306.

<sup>134</sup> James McEvoy's caricature of an established church is perhaps too harsh: "My attempts to imagine this scenario as O'Donovan beckons lead me to the image of church leaders addressing governments with the assertion: 'we don't want the power but you just do what we say!'" (J.G. McEvoy, 'A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan about Church and Government', *HeyJ* 48 (2007), 952-971[963]).

<sup>135</sup> O'Donovan, *Desire*, 217.

add force to the church's message by punishing the church's inner dissidents or conquering the church's outward enemies. O'Donovan explicitly rejects these aspects of Christendom as erroneous and unnecessary.<sup>136</sup> It is hard to see in what way the church needs the state beyond the provision of an ordered, lawful social space, which enables a community to exist within it in the first place. The church, like any other group, benefits from a coordinated agency that provides a measure of security and infrastructure.<sup>137</sup> The liberal state and its various goods may need the ongoing influence of the church. But the church does not need constitutionally entrenched privileges in order to thrive. Perhaps it is wiser to say that the church can only realize the full potential of its mission as it manages to win over rulers and kings, and can influence the respective institutions. However, once that goal is reached, the church actually faces numerous dangers of too much interference from the state, or of connecting its fortunes too closely with political power.<sup>138</sup>

## 2.2.5 Summary

Summing up our observations we can say:

- O'Donovan has a very high notion of political *authority* which enables political *life* – the flourishing of human communities. He closely ties both aspects together: There can be no good communal life without a good authority presiding over it.

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<sup>136</sup> McEvoy, however, points out that the church did not resort to coercion because it failed to focus on mission, as O'Donovan would have it, but used coercion for its mission: "In turning to coercion, it was precisely mission that the church had in view, understood in institutional and structural terms – the terms of the Christendom model"(McEvoy, 'Dialogue', 956). The problem lies in "...the nature of political power. Central to the project of making a secular government Christian during the second millennium was the attempt to shape social structures, institutions and culture in the image of the gospel and canon law. The success of this effort depended on a strong alliance between church and state..." (ibid., 962). Within this thesis the vocabulary is misleading (O'Donovan propagates a 'secular' government thanks to Christian influence), but otherwise the observation holds true.

<sup>137</sup> "The church does not ask for more room than is allowed to other movements" (G. de Kruijf, 'The Function of Romans 13 in Christian Ethics', Bartholomew-Chaplin-Song-Wolters, *A Royal Priesthood?*, 225-237 [235]).

<sup>138</sup> O'Donovan is aware of these dangers but they are not his central worry. As McIlroy puts it, O'Donovan sees as the greater danger that "...of allowing the state to define the scope of its own authority, and rubber-stamping that authority", rather than "... the state becoming the Church's tool for religious coercion" (McIlroy, 'Right Reason', 306).

- While the flourishing community seems to be something that will endure in God's plan for humanity, political authority in its well-known form as rule will come to an end.
- In Christ God constitutes the ultimate and truly flourishing community, which is the church. The church bears the mark of eschatological fulfilment because it draws its life and identity from no earthly rule but from the authority of the risen Christ, who rules invisibly and graciously and whose rule is appropriated by faith. This *transformed* notion of rule is not destined for destruction. Talking about the ultimately good communal life, O'Donovan transforms and transposes the notion of political authority in a Christological and eschatological key.
- In view of this Christological transformation of political authority and in view of Christ's ultimate claim of rule, standard political authority, which was so far acknowledged as good and necessary is suddenly problematized. It has to be beaten back and diminished.
- We now have the situation that a diminished and somewhat mutilated form of political authority presides over communities. We wonder how these communities can still flourish if their constitutive source is so greatly diminished.
- On the other hand we have the community of the church which clearly flourishes, because its head is Christ, God's ultimate ruler. However, Christ's rule, because it is rule in a transposed key, cannot and must not translate directly into earthly political authority. Hence the church still needs the existence of earthly political rulers.
- The whole notion of 'political', of 'Lordship' and of 'rule' constantly oscillates between the concrete exercise of earthly rule with its somewhat wanting aspect of temporal power and the transposed notion of Christ's merciful and invisible rule. While Christ's rule does not away with earthly rulers, they are given a more modest place.

- The notion of a minimal state comes dangerously close to subtracting and adding up Christ's and the rulers' power on one and the same calculation sheet: Christ's power diminishes the authorities' power. Christ cannot bear the existence of political authority in its undiminished form. On the other hand Christ cannot be represented by them. The consequence is a mutilated political authority and a Christ, whose rule seems somewhat imperfect, because the community he sponsors still needs aspects of earthly rule.
- Similarly the church does and does not need the community that is sponsored by the (greatly diminished) authorities. It needs part of it and it does not need other parts which seem equally important for communities. The church only seems to need the spiritual or symbolic notion of authority (when it comes to issues of salvation and communal identity) but needs a more robust and 'real' notion of justice, as provided by the state.
- Because O'Donovan's notion of Christ's rule oscillates so much between something that is on a different plain from standard political authority and something that is on a comparable level with the rulers of this world, and therefore engages and confronts them, the interaction of the church similarly oscillates between needing and not needing the state, between rejecting its salvific promises and supporting its efforts to uphold communities, between calling the state to modest minimal functions and encouraging the state to display maximum features of Christ's Kingdom.

In the next chapter we will explore Yoder's narrative of God's deed in Christ and how this affects the world of politics.

### 3. John Howard Yoder and the Faithful Church

#### 3.1 The Free Church Alternative

##### 3.1.1 Vision

In his wide and varied work, John Howard Yoder (1927-1997) argues passionately for the renewal of the church as a voluntary and non-violent community. Yoder relentlessly criticizes mainstream Christianity<sup>1</sup> for having abandoned faithfulness to Jesus and Jesus' ethical teaching in order to gain influence in society and to enter questionable forms of partnership with the state. This is most glaringly visible in the support many churches lend to wars and other forms of state-led violence. For this reason, topics of war, peace, pacifism and (non) violence "...occupied the lion's share of John Howard Yoder's time as scholar, teacher and ecumenical conversationalist."<sup>2</sup> For Yoder issues of violence and war are telling case studies which highlight a web of problematic ecclesiological and ethical decisions. Though Yoder is himself from a Mennonite background, and started his career as a historian writing about 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptism,<sup>3</sup> he refuses to be seen merely as an apologetic exponent for a certain denomination. Instead, he claims to call back the church to "unlimited catholicity",<sup>4</sup> to the theological and ethical basis that was true for the church in its early days, which was tragically lost in the wake of the Constantinian turn. Yoder paints the picture of a church that is made up of fully convinced Christians, who understand the cost of discipleship and are committed to put into practice Jesus' ethical demands. This believers' church is proposed by Yoder

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<sup>1</sup> Yoder includes Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and 'Niebuhrians' in his schematic overview of ethical models (J.H. Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* [Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998], 60-68. From now on this work will be referred to as 'WS').

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Yoder, Theodor J. Koontz and A. Alexis-Baker, eds., *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2009), 7 (Editor's preface).

<sup>3</sup> Yoder's doctoral dissertation was published as J.H. Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformatoren 1523-1538* (Karlsruhe: H. Schneider, 1962). Hanspeter Jecker lists around 60 contributions of Yoder to the historical research of Anabaptism (H.P. Jecker, 'La contribution de John H. Yoder à la recherche sur l'histoire anabaptiste' in Michel Sommer, ed., *La Sagesse de la Croix: Impulsions à partir de l'oeuvre de John Howard Yoder* (Charols: Edition Excelsis, 2007), 156-166.

<sup>4</sup> J.H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2001), 4. From now on this work will be referred to as 'PK'.

as the third way between coercive theocracy and individualistic spiritualism.<sup>5</sup> Such a church does not normally seek to be acknowledged by the state or to have access to the latter's institutions. Instead, exclusion and even persecution are likely to be part of its experience.<sup>6</sup>

Yoder at times accepts the label 'sectarian' in the "peculiar non-pejorative technical sense" of Troeltsch to classify his ecclesiology.<sup>7</sup> Over against influential ethicists and sociologists such as Richard Niebuhr, Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber Yoder insists that the choices between responsible involvement that has to compromise on radical Jesus ethics and sectarian purity, which withdraws from society are false alternatives.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Yoder seeks to unfold a genuine free-church epistemology, which has shaken off the conceptual chains of its mainstream critics and argues from within its own logic for why it acts in a certain way.<sup>9</sup>

Yoder welcomes the insight that every position, not least that which was seen for a long time as general and universal, is actually rooted in a particular historical community. At the same time, he fully embraces the commanding and absolute truth of the gospel in its very particular form.<sup>10</sup> Yoder opposes ethical 'blueprint thinking' which tries to give the right answers prior to any given situation.<sup>11</sup> There is no ethical concept that can be developed "from scratch."<sup>12</sup> Instead, the believing community

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<sup>5</sup> J.H. Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 68-73. From now on this work will be referred to as 'RP'.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for instance J.H. Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 1992) and numerous other essays on ecclesiology in RP part III (pp.221-373).

<sup>7</sup> PK 6.

<sup>8</sup> On the persistent notion of Yoder as an advocate of irresponsibility cf. M.Thiessen Nation, "'Social Irresponsibility' or the Offense of the Cross?" in idem, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 145-188.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, who is deeply influenced by Yoder, writes in his homage: "John did not provide new answers to old questions; but rather, like Wittgenstein, he changed the questions" (S. Hauerwas. C. Huebner, H. Huebner, M.Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), xi.

<sup>10</sup> PK, 43. "The fact that all meanings are community-dependent does not mean that all views are equally valid" (J. H. Yoder, "Patience" as Method in Moral Reasoning' in Hauerwas-Huebner-Thiessen Nation, *Wisdom*, 24-42 [27]).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. J.H. Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997], 91). From now on this work will be referred to as FN.

<sup>12</sup> In recent years Yoder has been discovered and claimed as an anti-foundationalist thinker who offers fruitful impulses in the post-modernity debate by unmasking universal systems as coercive and violent. For this new approach cf. P. Dula and C. K. Huebner, eds., *The New Yoder* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), in particular the essays of Travis Kroeker and Daniel Colucciello Barber

discerns within its egalitarian structures the will of God as revealed in Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Yoder's work itself has very much the form of a dialogue,<sup>14</sup> engaging with all kind of voices and giving preference to the format of articles and lectures over against monographs.<sup>15</sup> Despite his hermeneutics of particularity, Yoder is convinced that moral reasoning with dialogue partners from a different background is possible and desirable: "More than any other person, Yoder has laboured to bring the Peace Church witness against violence into the mainstream of theological discussion."<sup>16</sup>

In this brief presentation of Yoder's vision, I will concentrate on Yoder's "landmark monograph"<sup>17</sup> *The Politics of Jesus*. In addition I will focus on his *The Christian Witness to the State*, a small and early monograph written mostly for fellow Mennonites. These two books are complemented by three essay collections, *A Royal Priesthood*, *The Priestly Kingdom* and *For the Nations*, which contain many of Yoder's concerns.

### 3.1.2 Jesus as Norm

#### 3.1.2.1 The Source of Ethics

Yoder's central concern is to rediscover the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus for the church. If Jesus is Lord, the pattern he set in his earthly career, both in word and deed, is binding for the church. As Yoder famously put it, "The real issue is not whether Jesus can make sense in a world far from Galilee, but whether – when he

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therein. I shall not engage more deeply with this new strand of Yoder research as the questions of my project are situated in the 'Old Yoder' debate of political ethics and the relationship between church and state.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood" (PK, 15-45). Zimbelmann points to a certain tension between "...the view of a norm as absolute and eternally binding [namely non-violence]" and "a commitment to deliberative and dialogical community reflection on how best to 'incarnate' it in changing contexts..." (J. Zimbelmann, 'The Contribution of John Howard Yoder to Recent Discussions in Christian Social Ethics', *SJT* 45 (1992), 367-399.

<sup>14</sup> "Yoder was not and never claimed to be a political theorist" (Ashley Woodiwiss in J. Budziszewski, *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006], 187). His work was a dialogue, "always responding in a community" rather than a "freestanding intellectual project" (Hauerwas and Huebner, 'History, Theory and Anabaptism: A Conversation on Theology after John Howard Yoder' in Hauerwas-Huebner-Thiessen Nation, *Wisdom*, 391-408 [391]).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Thiessen Nation, 'A comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder', *MQR* 71 (1997), 93-145, listing several hundred titles.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 204.

<sup>17</sup> Travis Kroeker, 'Is a Messianic Political Ethic Possible? Recent Work by and about John Howard Yoder' in *JRE* 33 (2005), 141-174 (141).



meets us in our world, as he does in fact – we want to follow him.”<sup>18</sup> Yoder argues that there is a trajectory, from God’s will for humanity as revealed in Jesus to the church which follows its Lord, which has enormous political potential, both in terms of subversion and inspiration. Yoder criticizes the various attempts to bypass Jesus as the primary source for ethics.<sup>19</sup> These attempts sharply increased after the Constantinian turn, when Jesus’ ethics were no longer seen as binding for everybody. Theologians turned to other sources to gain more general and more viable insight into the structure of reality and the duties for people in different walks of life. Yoder repeatedly attacks such competing sources, which he sometimes labels “other lights”<sup>20</sup> or “wider wisdom”<sup>21</sup> or “that other Realm.”<sup>22</sup> He especially rejects any moral reasoning based on natural law or the created order.<sup>23</sup> Yoder insists that nature as we observe it is always fallen nature and cannot provide us with ethical insight.<sup>24</sup> We must take our cue from revelation, more precisely from God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Yoder stresses that the incarnation must not be interpreted as God’s benevolent affirmation of the entire human reality. Instead, the incarnation has critical potential: God reveals the human being after God’s own heart, the non-violent and loving servant of others. At the same time his revelation pronounces judgment on the violent and selfish ways of living a human life.<sup>25</sup> Higher Christology is in harmony with the example the human being Jesus set, since the creedal statements affirm that the very concrete example of the man Jesus has been vindicated and pronounced normative by God through raising and exalting Jesus: “The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> PK, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J.H. Yoder, ‘Mainstream Ethics: Jesus is Not the Norm’, in idem, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 4-8. From now on this work will be referred to as ‘PJ’.

<sup>20</sup> RP, 184.

<sup>21</sup> RP, 110.

<sup>22</sup> WS, 79. “Common to all is the tacit or explicit claim that this other standard of “justice” 1) is knowable apart from Jesus Christ and 2) differs from Him in what it demands of men” (WS, 80).

<sup>23</sup> PJ, 8, 19, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. e.g. WS, 33-34. Budziszewski remarks critically and rightly that “...homage to the ‘bare givenness’ of things is hardly what the natural law tradition has had in mind” (Budziszewski, *Evangelicals*, 92).

<sup>25</sup> PJ, 99.

<sup>26</sup> PJ, 103. For the debate about the degree to which orthodox Christology is embraced and used by Yoder cf. C. Carter, *The Politics of the Cross: The Theology and Social Ethics of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2001), who affirms this, and D. J. Weaver, ‘The John Howard Yoder Legacy: Whither the Second Generation’ *MQR* 77 (2003), 451-471 (455), who is more critical.

This norm then, is binding for all who want to follow Jesus. This does not force people away from their nature into something that is alien to them. On the contrary they become truly what they are meant to be in God's good original vision: "The behaviour God calls for is not alien to us; it expresses what we really are made to be."<sup>27</sup> "Put simply, the Christian narrative tells us that the God of creation continues to create and recreate in light of the fallenness and sinfulness of original creation. God wills the restoration of all creation. Hence an 'ethic of the kingdom' and an 'ethic of creation' must be one and the same ethic. If not, God was not significantly in Christ."<sup>28</sup>

Privileging Jesus as norm, however, does not lead to a rejection of other insights. As long as the river flows in the right direction - from Jesus as the fountain to various situations and patterns of ethical reasoning - a broad approach is possible.<sup>29</sup> "Yoder's position is not christomonist in the sense of rejecting all sources of knowledge except Christ, but it is christocentric in the sense of testing all knowledge by the norm of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, which is always central."<sup>30</sup>

### 3.1.2.2 The Pattern of Ethics

But of what does this binding ethical pattern of Jesus precisely comprise? Yoder describes the Christian lifestyle in his various works as 'servanthood', 'love of enemy', 'non-violence', 'suffering love', 'reconciliation' and sometimes 'non-resisting love'. In his central exegetical work *The Politics of Jesus* Yoder adds the catchword of 'non-violent resistance' as summing up best Jesus' attitude.<sup>31</sup> Yoder refuses to portray Jesus as a merely spiritual and un-political redeemer. Giving a

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<sup>27</sup> FN, 212.

<sup>28</sup> H. J. Huebner, 'Moral Agency as Embodiment: How the Church Acts' in Hauerwas-Huebner-Theissen Nation, *Wisdom*, 189-212 (204).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. RP, 138. "They must, therefore, judge what they do and what they leave to others by the standards of what is most specific, what is most clearly in the line of their primary mission" (RP, 178).

<sup>30</sup> Carter, *Politics*, 218.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. especially *PJ*, 89 -111. This term is of the highest significance in Yoder's work as it tries to argue against the assumption that "non-resistance" implied passivity in the face of evil..." (K. Obiewke, 'Why and how Yoder can be read in terms of nonviolent resistance', *MQR* 83 (2009), 113-130 (116). Similarly Zimbelmann, 'Contribution', 388. It is unfortunate that Budziszewski uses the term 'nonviolent nonresistance' in his introduction to Yoder (Budziszewski, *Evangelicals*, 87). Schuurmann is unaware of the term, pitting passive non-resistance against active love for the weaker party which must, at times, involve the use of lethal force (D. J. Schuurmann, 'Vocation, Christendom and Public Life: A Reformed Assessment of Yoder's Anabaptist Critique of Christendom', *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1 (2007), 247- 271 [270]).

close reading of the gospel of Luke in the first part of the book, Yoder emphasizes that Jesus' activities have highly social and political connotations. But he equally rejects the one time popular notion that Jesus was a Zealot and thus 'political' in a theocratic and militant sense.<sup>32</sup>

Instead, Yoder claims that "[a]t the core of Jesus' ministry lies the formation of a non-violent and non-national 'polis', a structured community. This is Jesus' political action par excellence: He refuses to join in the well-known political game and invents an altogether new one instead in the formation of a group."<sup>33</sup> Jesus and Herod, like Jesus and Caesar, meet on the same turf but with totally different visions of the 'political'<sup>34</sup>: "The alternative to how the kings of the earth rule is not 'spirituality' but servanthood."<sup>35</sup> Luke 22:25-26 is key for Yoder and among the verses from the New Testament he quotes most often. Servanthood and suffering are central for this new way of living. The disciples have to reckon with the cross as the punishment for insurrection: "To be a disciple is to share in that style of life of which the cross is the culmination."<sup>36</sup> The reason that this peaceful group of disciples is greeted with such hatred lies in the fact that it "...constitutes an unavoidable challenge to the powers that be..."<sup>37</sup> "Both Jewish and Roman authorities were defending themselves against a real threat. That the threat was not one of *armed*, violent revolt, and that it nonetheless bothered them to the point of their resorting to irregular procedures to counter it, is a proof of the political relevance of nonviolent tactics..."<sup>38</sup>

In short, Yoder portrays Jesus as a non-nationalistic, non-violent 'Zealot', a pacifist revolutionary.<sup>39</sup> Because of this closeness to the Zealots, Jesus is repeatedly and severely tempted to take up secular power and use violence to reach his ends. To take

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<sup>32</sup> PJ 42, n.36.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. FN, 190f. and PK, 180.

<sup>34</sup> "What is Caesar's and what is God's are not on different levels, so as never to clash; they are in the same arena" (PJ, 44-45).

<sup>35</sup> PJ, 39.

<sup>36</sup> PJ, 38.

<sup>37</sup> PJ, 39. "They do not crucify quietists" (FN, 216).

<sup>38</sup> PJ, 49.

<sup>39</sup> "Contrary to the charges of some critics, Christ's character [as portrayed by Yoder,] is not one of passivity in the face of evil, but a serious challenge to, and transformation of, the social status quo" (Obiewke, 'Nonviolent Resistance', 128).

up arms to bring about social change is “...the one temptation the man Jesus faced”<sup>40</sup> whereas it never occurred to him to propagate social withdrawal or join the establishment.<sup>41</sup>

His successful resistance of the ‘Zealot temptation’ crowns Jesus’ mission. The cross is the epitome of evangelical ethics: the faithful servant of God suffers and absorbs the hostility of his enemies without striking back: “The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come.”<sup>42</sup>

The resurrection “vindicates the way of the cross, which itself came about as a result of the politics of Jesus.”<sup>43</sup>

The wider New Testament consistently affirms this stance of non-violent resistance according to Yoder. What is remembered of Jesus’ example is not so much his poverty or his celibacy or his itinerant lifestyle.<sup>44</sup> Instead the epistles consistently admonish the believers to follow the paradigm of the cross, to be ready and willing to suffer, to choose to serve rather than to dominate and to accept opposition.<sup>45</sup>

“Servanthood replaces dominion, forgiveness absorbs hostility.”<sup>46</sup> Yoder famously and notoriously detected in the ‘Haustafeln’ and even Romans 13:1-7 the pattern of ‘non-violent resistance’ or, as he calls it now, of ‘revolutionary subordination’.<sup>47</sup> The ‘Haustafeln’ do not reflect wisdom borrowed from Stoic ethics because of the embarrassment that an apocalyptic Jesus has nothing to say in matters of created orders and everyday life.<sup>48</sup> According to Yoder, their Christian *proprium* is precisely the reflection of the ‘servanthood instead of domination’ pattern. It is thus a case of practical application of “the ethic of the immediate kingdom in Jesus...” not about

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<sup>40</sup> PJ, 96.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. PJ, 97 and FN, 169-174. For the three critical moments of temptation cf. PJ, 25-28; 34-36; 39-45.

<sup>42</sup> PJ, 51 or most extreme: “This life brought him [Jesus], as any genuinely human existence will bring anyone, to the cross” (PJ, 145).

<sup>43</sup> Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> PJ, 95.

<sup>45</sup> For the full pattern of love-service-suffering in the New Testament cf. PJ., 115-127. The cross is seen as both the highest expression of love for the enemy and as the “...price of social nonconformity”, the predictable “...end of a path freely chosen after counting the cost” (PJ, 96).

<sup>46</sup> PJ, 131. In yet another place, Yoder sums up Jesus’ ethical posture as “...vulnerable enemy love and renunciation of dominion in the real world” (PJ, 132).

<sup>47</sup> PJ, ‘Revolutionary Subordination’, 162-192.

<sup>48</sup> PJ, 165.

filling the gap with “the ethic of stable society.”<sup>49</sup> The witness of the church consists in showing the world that Christians handle this freedom in a spirit of humble gentleness – they quietly transform their social roles (to a degree) and show no intention of imposing their values on the wider world.<sup>50</sup> Romans 13:1-7 shows the explicit unwillingness of the Christian group to seek armed revolution. The reality of political authority is soberly accepted, the Christians submit to it, even in their disobedience: “...the Christian who refuses to worship Caesar but still permits Caesar to put him or her to death, is being subordinate even though not obeying.”<sup>51</sup>

### 3.1.3 The Church as the Bearer of the Meaning of History

#### 3.1.3.1 The Community of the New Age

If the church was the result of ‘the politics of Jesus’ during his lifetime, this is even more the case after Jesus’ resurrection. The church is, in the present age, the *locus* of revelation to the world. The restored relationships in the church are not secondary consequences of the gospel – they *are* the gospel.<sup>52</sup> “The medium and the message are inseparable.”<sup>53</sup> The church is a model community of the *eschaton* by showing humanity after God’s own heart. It is the firstfruit of the new age.<sup>54</sup> Because it does not belong to the old *aeon* it most likely finds itself at a critical distance from the wider world. “Only a believing community with a “thick” particular identity has something to say to whatever ‘public’ is ‘out there’ to address.”<sup>55</sup> The church is called to faithfulness to Jesus, both in correctly remembering and concretely living out his legacy, and therefore honouring him as its present Lord. This happens in the power of the Holy Spirit as “[t]he Spirit makes the witness of the community possible.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> PJ, 179.

<sup>50</sup> “But precisely because of Christ we shall not impose that shift violently upon the social order beyond the confines of the church” (PJ, 185).

<sup>51</sup> PJ, 209.

<sup>52</sup> Yoder calls the church a ‘pulpit’ and a ‘paradigm’ (RP, 91).

<sup>53</sup> FN, 41.

<sup>54</sup> RP, 126.

<sup>55</sup> FN, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Carter, *Politics*, 233.

The church, in its concrete, visible form discloses the meaning of history:

“...biblically the meaning of history is carried first of all, and on behalf of all others, by the believing community.”<sup>57</sup> This is what God has begun in Jesus and what he will bring to fulfilment. In that sense, the church owns the future because it belongs to the age to come. In negotiating the church’s way as a distinctive social entity at critical distance from the wider world, Yoder is inspired by the *diaspora* experience of biblical Israel and later Judaism, from the Babylonian exile onwards.<sup>58</sup> Yoder sees Israel as refining its calling from a theocracy to a landless and powerless people, which has learnt to live among other nations, mediating between the cultures and offering services to wider society while preserving a distinctive identity.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 On not Being in Charge

By holding on to its distinctive identity, modelled upon the example and authority of Jesus and lived out in the power of the Spirit, the church accepts that it has no control over history. Or to put it differently, the church accepts that it is the bearer of God’s presently hidden history, and declines to read God’s deeds from the face of official history.<sup>60</sup> This insight was fundamentally confused during the Constantinian turn, where God’s rule became identified with the course of an earthly empire, whereas the identity of the church became compromised and therefore unreadable:

“Previously Christians had known as a fact of experience that the church existed but had to believe against appearances that Christ ruled over the world. After Constantine one knew as a fact of experience that Christ was ruling over the world but had to believe against the evidence that there existed “a believing church”. Thus the order of redemption was subordinated to that of preservation, and the Christian hope turned inside out.”<sup>61</sup> ‘Constantinianism’, as Yoder calls it, refers to this fateful

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<sup>57</sup> RP, 118.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Yoder’s ‘See how they go with their Faces to the Sun’ in FN, 51-78.

<sup>59</sup> Yoder’s presentation of Judaism as a landless, voluntary *diaspora* group has been sympathetically discussed but also criticized as a one-sided Christian reading of Judaism (cf. Kroeker, ‘Messianic Ethic’, 162-164; J. A. Reimer, ‘Theological Orthodoxy and Jewish Christianity: A Personal Tribute to John Howard Yoder’ in Hauerwas-Huebner-Thiessen Nation, *Wisdom*, 430-448 [esp. 438-446] and Daniel Boyarin, ‘Judaism as Free Church’ in Dula-Huebner, *New Yoder*, 1-17).

<sup>60</sup> “[I]t is clear in the New Testament that the meaning of history is not what the state will achieve in the way of a progressively more tolerable ordering of society, but what the church achieves through evangelism and through the leavening process” (RP, 163).

<sup>61</sup> RP, 57.

confusion in ecclesiological and ethical thinking which was repeated many times after the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup>

Instead the church has to accept the fact that it is not doing ‘ethics for everyone’. In defending pacifism from the charge of irresponsibility, Yoder emphasizes that the peace-church approach does not just provide different or better answers but challenges the questions of mainstream ethics. The question ‘What if everybody did this?’ for instance is a typical Constantinian question<sup>63</sup> which is committed to ‘doing ethics for everyone’ and in particular to view ethical problems from the perspective of the ruler. The free-church perspective is different. It is from below, from the minority perspective, contemplating rather the victim’s view than the ruler’s one.<sup>64</sup> It knows that “Christian ethics is for Christians.”<sup>65</sup> They can only be lived out in the power of the Spirit and in the context of a community where each member has committed him- or herself to them. It makes no sense to ask them of everybody.<sup>66</sup>

The church’s foremost vocation is therefore to be faithful and missionary, not to be influential and successful.<sup>67</sup> “The Christian’s responsibility for defeating evil is to resist the temptation to meet it on its own terms.”<sup>68</sup> To let bad things happen, which they have no power to stop non-violently is no capital sin for which Christians have to be held answerable.<sup>69</sup> Instead they are freed from the urge to run the world and

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<sup>62</sup> For a good overview cf. ‘The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics’ (PK, 135-147). For a vigorous attack on both Yoder’s narrative of a ‘fall’ of the church as well as his portrayal of Constantine and his time cf. P.J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academics, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> “Since we are all children of Christendom we think we must answer this; but logically we need not and cannot – because everybody will not” (RP, 175). Cf. also PK 154-155.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. WS, 41.

<sup>65</sup> RP, 62, 116 and FN, 104-105.

<sup>66</sup> “Christian behavior presupposes the resources of faith” (FN, 112). These resources are described as “...love, repentance, the willingness to sacrifice, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, within the supporting fellowship of the church” (WS, 29). “The obedience of faith does not make sense apart from the context of faith” (PK, 110).

<sup>67</sup> “Something structurally different is going on when the priority of the believing community is seen not as lordship but as servanthood, not as privilege but as pointer, not as achievement but as promise” (RP, 119).

<sup>68</sup> RP, 152.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. ‘Let it be’, PK, 99-101. “In that context most pacifists accept the fact that non-pacifists will be running the world violently” (PK, 101). Zimbelmann describes Yoder’s redefinition of Christian responsibility in terms of an “expressive’ rationality”: “Christian ethics are not simply oriented towards principles or results but must truthfully embody and express the Christian narrative” (Zimbelmann, ‘Contribution’, 383).

from the often cynical calculus of utilitarian ethics.<sup>70</sup> This opens up a space of freedom for creative experiments of living together as a community.<sup>71</sup> The strength to endure unimportance and weakness comes from the trust in God's promise. "The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection."<sup>72</sup> To hold on to the path which has been marked out by Jesus has to do with eschatological hope and a doxological attitude that sees beyond the visible.<sup>73</sup> Or as Yoder puts it in another famous *bonmot*: "Faith is what it takes to obey."<sup>74</sup>

Again all this must not be misunderstood as rejection of every kind of calculus, influence, sober reckoning of consequences, etc. As long as Jesus is the irreducible key to understanding the world:

...to follow Jesus does not mean to renounce effectiveness on principle. It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation within the social process in favour of delayed gratification in heaven, or abandoning efficacy in favour of purity. It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which kinds of causation, which kinds of community-building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things)...and the Lord ("sitting at the right hand")...<sup>75</sup>

Equally the church is invited to discern good and bad in the history of the world, to both affirm and to critique.<sup>76</sup> What it must not do is to identify any particular

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. FN, 194f.

<sup>71</sup> "A church once freed from compulsiveness and from the urge to manage the world might then find ways and words to suggest as well to those outside its bounds the invitation to a servant stance in society" (PJ, 240-245).

<sup>72</sup> PJ, 232.

<sup>73</sup> RP, 123. Faith is about "...affirming that the relationship between my obedience and the accomplishment of the purposes of God must include my losing track of my own effectiveness in the great reservoir of the pressure of love" (RP, 206).

<sup>74</sup> FN, 149.

<sup>75</sup> PJ, 246.

<sup>76</sup> "To see history doxologically is to be empowered and obligated to discern, down through the centuries, which historical developments can be welcomed as progress in the light of the Rule of the Lamb and which as setbacks" (RP, 132).



movement or regime with the will of God and to subordinate its own ethical-ecclesial stance to it.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.1.3.3 Witness beyond the Church

The church's mere existence as a reconciled community is its primary witness. Without a distinctive identity of the church the concept of witness becomes pointless. But this witness impacts wider society in a number of ways:<sup>78</sup>

a) Yoder is convinced that a faithful church in the midst of wider society has a 'leavening effect'. Its practices will present the watching world with inspiring and creative models of how to organize community life.<sup>79</sup> Yoder likes to point out that modern achievements, such as parliamentary procedures, free speech and equality, are the fruits of religious non-conformity which were embodied by the latter in a pioneering way and later on taken over by wider society.<sup>80</sup>

b) Besides this rather unplanned ripple effect of Christian witness, there is direct engagement with groups and institutions of society, not least with the state. The community effort of discernment leads to a public response. Believers are to denounce, to challenge and to affirm what they see as good and bad. The church has a prophetic vocation and must be the conscience rather than the chaplain of society. Yoder is aware of the predominantly negative thrust of this vocation and fully affirms it. Like the prophets in the Old Testament, the church has to lift its voice against what it sees as evil, even if it does not know a better solution yet.

The important thing is that what the church upholds as good values is credibly embodied by its own community.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Tom Harder sees the 'primacy of faithfulness' coordinated with 'the possibility of effectiveness'. (T. Harder, 'The Dichotomy Between Faithfulness and Effectiveness in the Peace Theology of John Howard Yoder', *MQR* 81 (2007), 227-238 (228, 232).

<sup>78</sup> Mark Thiessen Nation sums up the church's witness beyond the church as offering analogies, providing moral osmosis and creating their own projects (Thiessen Nation, *Yoder*, 161).

<sup>79</sup> Yoder makes various suggestions about the beneficial influence of 'Servant Strength' in PK, 96-99. For the social impact of the five ecclesial practices of binding and loosing, breaking bread, baptism, the charismatic contribution of each member in worship and communal discernment cf. Yoder, *Body Politics*.

<sup>80</sup> For a list of good practices which may be inspired by free-church habits, cf. PK, 93-94.

<sup>81</sup> WS, 21, 22, Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 100.

c) If the church can give limited or wholehearted affirmation to a development, an institution or movement from within its own convictions, there is a limited space for involvement in secular and political institutions for Christians. Some positions will always be closed to believers and they do not have to ‘fill every slot’ in society.<sup>82</sup> But there are numerous opportunities to serve and work for the ‘common good’.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Christians will from time to time seek strategic alliances or join with non-Christian movements.<sup>84</sup> They always need to be very cautious, that the church does not confuse a certain movement with the Kingdom of God, nor does it try to impose its beliefs on wider society.

### 3.2 Analysis

As in the presentation of O’Donovan’s work I will trace crucial points of Yoder’s narrative and reflect on them in a more systematic fashion. I will draw particular attention to Yoder’s complex notion of political authority, which is more complex than his initially negative stance suggests. I will also show that Yoder’s presentation of Christ’s Lordship gets close to subverting altogether notions of Lordship and rule as such. Out of this grows a view of the church as the true political community, which functions within a totally distinctive pattern of the ‘political’ from the wider world. I will show that this claim leads Yoder to downplay the sense that the church still needs earthly political structures and to a highly ambiguous concept of the church engaging the state. After giving a summary of Yoder’s view I will evaluate both the strengths and the problematic sides (‘positive’ and ‘negative’) in Yoder’s narrative.

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. RP, 63.

<sup>83</sup> To my knowledge Yoder does not use this term in a precise philosophical way. He has however, a broad concept of ‘serving the general populace beyond the church’.

<sup>84</sup> “Between the position of the ‘witness’ speaking to the statesman from within the church and the hypothetical extreme of a Christian wielding the sword of justice within legal limits, there runs the great gamut of degrees of involvement or participation, where most actual decisions lie” (WS, 57).

### 3.2.1 Political Authority

#### 3.2.1.1 Analysis

Yoder has a mostly negative, frequently ambiguous and, at best, sober view of political authority. To him, standard political authority is the attempt to order communities by means of domination which include the use of force and violence. Narratives which try to set forth positive reasons for the need of political authority, and its use of such means, have to be viewed with a healthy dose of suspicion. Political authority or ‘the state’ as Yoder prefers to put it, is mostly not seen as rooted in God’s original creative activity.<sup>85</sup> However, Yoder shows different shades in his assessment of the state, to which the following sections point:

##### a) The bad state

Sometimes Yoder suggests that political authority or political power is diabolic in its very roots: “There is a very strong strand of Gospel teaching which sees secular government as the province of the sovereignty of Satan.”<sup>86</sup> That God ultimately is in charge of rulers and states does not mean that God has created them or approves of their ways.<sup>87</sup> God merely orders the phenomenon of political authority/power, keeping it in check and occasionally using it to produce some good despite its inherently problematic character.<sup>88</sup>

##### b) The ambiguous state

On the whole, political authority is something that is a given in our fallen world, sometimes making it more tolerable, sometimes contributing to its ills. Yoder finds

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<sup>85</sup> WS 82. It is unfortunate that Zimbelmann does not substantiate his important claim that for Yoder the state is seen as “necessary, though ‘pre-fall’ ordering of community” (Zimbelmann, ‘Contribution’, 393). Yoder merely affirms “the foundation of human society” as being “within the creative intention of God” (WS, 34).

<sup>86</sup> PJ, 194. O’Donovan remarks on this with reference to the temptation story: “I know of only two interpreters who have said that the Devil could make this offer because the kingdoms of the world were diabolical. One was John Yoder, the other Pope Gregory Hildebrand – not the most obvious bedfellows!” (O. O’Donovan and J. Lockwood O’Donovan, ‘Political Theology’ in Rupert Shortt, ed., *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* [Darton: Longmann and Todd, 2005], 248-272 [256]).

<sup>87</sup> PJ, 149.

<sup>88</sup> Yoder uses the images of a librarian who orders books without approving of the content (PJ, 201) and of an architect who uses gravity to build a cathedral (RP, 159).

the work of various NT scholars on principalities and powers very useful in expressing this ambiguity.<sup>89</sup> The world and human society cannot exist without the powers that stand behind various cultural, social and political realities. At the same time, these powers participate deeply in the reality of the fall. However, even in this strand of Yoder's thinking that allows for political power to be rooted in creation after all, the element of fallenness seems to be stronger than the element of created goodness: "The *aion houtos* is at the same time chaos and a kingdom... a demonic blend of order and revolt... It is creaturely order in the state of rebellion..."<sup>90</sup>

### c) The modest state

Yoder emphasizes that the state is not very important anyway from an eschatological perspective. Yoder describes kings as having "precious little control" over the world. God has no particular need of them.<sup>91</sup> On the one hand the state has no business in the mission of the church. In fact, it would be the worst of all errors to make the state an agent of eschatological reality and would deeply distort both the state and the church.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, the state exists for the sake of the church only.<sup>93</sup> Yoder finds this view backed up in passages such as 1Tim 2:1-5. The state's task is to provide a space of peace for the church, where the latter can fulfil its mission. "The reign of Christ means for the state the obligation to serve God by encouraging the good and restraining evil, i.e., to serve peace, to preserve the social cohesion in which the leaven of the Gospel can build the church, and also render the old aeon more tolerable."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "...[i]t would not be too much to claim that the Pauline cosmology of the powers represents an alternative to the dominant ("Thomist") vision of "natural law" as a more biblical way systematically to relate Christ and creation" (PJ, 159).

<sup>90</sup> RP, 56.

<sup>91</sup> RP, 134.

<sup>92</sup> Yoder warns about "...a confusion between the providential purpose of the state, that of achieving a "tolerable balance of egoisms" (an expression borrowed with gratitude from Reinhold Niebuhr) and the redemptive purpose of the church, the rejection of egoism in the commitment to discipleship. This confusion leads to the paganization of the church and the demonization of the state" (RP, 153).

<sup>93</sup> "...the Christian church knows why the state exists – knows, in fact, better than the state itself" (WS, 16).

<sup>94</sup> WS, 5.

These elements of thinking portray a state, which is not particularly necessary for God's eschatological purposes and certainly not an eschatological agent.<sup>95</sup> Still political authority is indirectly ordered towards God's eschatological purposes by creating a space for the church's mission. This approach could perhaps best be summed up as 'the modest state.'

#### **d) The challenged state**

It is crucial to see that Yoder's fairly detached view of the state is complemented by proposals that seek to engage the state in a much more proactive way and to call it to live up to the eschatological standards of the Kingdom of God. I will deal with this aspect at some length in the section 'The State and the Church in the Eschatological Age' (3.2.4.)

### **3.2.1.2 Critique**

Yoder refuses to define minimal criteria for a good or tolerable state. Because Jesus' Lordship reveals the true 'rule' as we shall see in 3.2.2 and because the church correspondingly embodies the true 'political' (3.2.3) standard political authority is de-ontologized as something that has no place in God's original vision. Political authority as we know it is prone not to uphold, but to destroy human communal life. Before I explore in more depth how Yoder links his view of the 'political' with Christ's Lordship I will discuss the prophetic potential as well as the problematic limitations of Yoder's dark view of political authority.

#### **a) Positive**

What can we say about Yoder's complex notion of the state? There is certainly much to be commended:

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<sup>95</sup> At this point Leithart repeatedly seems to talk at cross-purposes with Yoder when he explains for instance apologetically that "once the empire was a creedal empire, heresy could not be seen as a tolerable difference of opinion" (Leithart, *Constantine*, 293) or that "Cult was within his [the emperor's] jurisdiction as one who had care of the *status rei Romanae*" (ibid., 182). I imagine Yoder would throw up his hands in despair and say that this is exactly the problem: Christianity was never meant to be the supportive religious sub-structure of an empire nor was a political leader meant to act on behalf of the church.

Yoder is acutely aware that even the best state has a dark side to it. He very sharply highlights the fact that political authority is dependent on coercion and violence under the conditions of this world. If political authority is a necessary remedy for sin, the remedy, too, is bitter and can wreak havoc in the body if administered in the wrong way. States are by no means outside or above the reality of sin, even, and perhaps precisely, as they combat it. They most likely participate in it, too. For Christians who are in danger of being too much dazzled by military parades and the shiny rituals of 'orderly' political power, Yoder's warnings are a healthy reminder of the dark and sometimes oppressive reality behind all political authority.

Yoder's instinct is certainly right that the eschatological horizon points beyond what is seen as good and normal in this world. The cry 'But not so with you!' (Luke 22:26) must be upheld in and by the church. The eschatological reality makes everything else look wanting. There is a 'better righteousness' (Matthew 5:20), and those who live by it can never leave it, neither in their actions nor in their judgment.

**b) Negative:**

On the other hand there are problematic points in Yoder's view of political authority.

Coming from this eschatological high-point of assessment, Yoder deliberately holds the state in some sort of 'ontological suspense'. He is remarkably resilient in his refusal to give minimal criteria for a 'good' state. He worries that this will give the state a false autonomy and a false complacency. However, this lack of criteria can be exasperating at times. If the church is to call the state to order, what are the standards to which the state should be held accountable? Yoder would point to the *eschaton* again. On the one hand, the state is to provide structures for the church, the eschatological community; on the other hand, the 'gold-standard' is Jesus' non-violent pattern. We shall deal with the former under 'The church as a political community'.

The problem with the latter is that there is no space in the tight trajectory from Jesus to the church to the rest of the world, to weigh up relative good and relative bad outside this trajectory. Some relative ethical goods (such as the punishment of a guilty criminal) do not seem to take their cue from the 'rule of the lamb', as they reflect neither suffering love nor nonviolent servanthood. Still, they are on a different

ethical plain from harming an innocent person. In Yoder's trajectory, there are no fine-tuned instruments to evaluate such a case properly. The bright eschatological light casts a rather dark shadow on the activities of the state and, at times, impairs the discernment of relative good and bad.

### **3.2.2 Christ's Lordship**

#### **3.2.2.1 Analysis**

Christ's Lordship both in the church and beyond is of supreme importance for Yoder. In the first part of this analysis I will show how Christ's Lordship subverts notions of rule and domination in Yoder's reading and can only be linked with difficulty to categories such as success or victory. The church is the place where this Lordship is visibly embodied in an obedient and alternative community. The humble Lord and the peaceful church are closely connected in a relationship of example and imitation but also encouragement and obedience. I will therefore discuss Yoder's notion of the church before I critically evaluate promises and problems of this figure of thought in 3.2.3.2.

##### **a) Christ's character**

Christ has in his earthly career subverted and re-defined the idea of Lordship. He was present as the one who serves and suffers. As such he threatened the powers that be and as such he was vindicated and exalted by God. To Yoder, it is very important that the cross is the revelation of God *par excellence* and not some stage in Christ's career to be overcome or reversed by the resurrection. Talking about Yoder's interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11, Kroeker states that "Yoder points to the unity of condescension (as the mode of God's being in loving self-emptying) and exaltation (of the humble and obedient, crucified servant) as the pattern – the logic of solidarity – between God and humankind."<sup>96</sup> Yoder certainly conceives of Christ's Lordship in a very realistic sense, not just as a metaphorical confirmation of certain values. "That authority [Christ's] however, is not coercive but nonviolent; it cannot be imposed,

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<sup>96</sup> Kroeker, 'Messianic Ethic', 149.

only offered.”<sup>97</sup> Domination, violence and force are completely foreign to Christ’s character even as the Risen Lord. It is a contradiction in terms to use them to spread Christ’s rule. Christ is patient with the world in “respecting this freedom to the bitter end.”<sup>98</sup>

**b) The scope of Christ’s Lordship:**

Beyond this, Christ’s Lordship unfolds in two ways:

Christ is first and foremost the head of his church. This relationship is straightforward: the church consciously confesses Christ as Lord and organizes its communal life according to his example. It looks back to Christ’s earthly pattern of living and conforms in its practices to his humility, love and servanthood. It looks forward to the ultimate victory and takes its comfort and hope from there. All this is re-enacted in the sacraments and in the presence and power of Christ’s spirit.

Christ’s Lordship also liberates the church to renounce dominion and control on this earth: “The Christian community is the only community whose social hope is that we need not rule because Christ is Lord.”<sup>99</sup>

This last quotation points to the important thought that, “Christ is not only the Head of the church; he is at the same time Lord of history, reigning at the right hand of God over the principalities and powers. The old aeon, representative of human history under the mark of sin, has also been brought under the reign of Christ (which is not identical with the consummate kingdom of God, 1 Cor.15:24).”<sup>100</sup> At this stage, I simply point to this very important aspect of Christ’s Lordship in Yoder’s thinking. Some thoughts about its potential, along with some critical thoughts, shall be offered under ‘The Interaction between the State and the Church in the Eschatological Age’ 2.2.4.

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<sup>97</sup> FN, 25.

<sup>98</sup> RP, 151.

<sup>99</sup> RP, 177.

<sup>100</sup> RP, 149.



Christ's Lordship of the church is so closely connected to the 'church as political society' that I shall evaluate both topics together in section 2.2.3.2. We first turn to our summary of Yoder's view of the church as a political society.

### 3.2.3 The Church as Political Society

#### 3.2.3.1 Analysis

The first fruit of salvation is the reconciled community, not the redeemed individual according to Yoder.<sup>101</sup> Because of this the Christian faith is instantly political. The church is a society, a *polis*, the imagery in the New Testament "is more political (kingdom, Messiah, New Jerusalem, *politeuma*) than cultic."<sup>102</sup> While the earlier Yoder seems to use 'political' for the common violent ways of the world by which its communities are organized, he increasingly uses the term for the church's life as well.<sup>103</sup> "Anything is political which deals with how people live together in organized ways."<sup>104</sup> Whereas the church represents the eschatological and redeemed form of such an organization, political institutions represent in lesser and higher degrees the attempts of the old *aeon* to organize human life.<sup>105</sup> Only in the church do we have the true political and the true *polis*. Hans Ulrich suggests that, for Yoder and Hauerwas, the origin of the political as reflected by the church is thought as something positive, along Aristotelian lines, not a reaction to the reality of sin. "Am Anfang war der Friede" says Ulrich together with Hauerwas. "Das richtet sich gegen jene politische Theorie, die... damit einsetzt, dass das Politische (der Staat) nötig ist, weil immer schon Gewalt droht, weil immer schon und immer wieder neu ein Freund-Feind-Verhältnis gegeben ist..."<sup>106</sup> "Das Politische... [ist] ...eine gute, glückliche Form des Zusammenlebens, die Frieden impliziert. Politisch zusammenleben heisst, miteinander zurechtkommen... Yoder und Hauerwas haben in

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<sup>101</sup> It might be remarked *en passant* that Yoder's strong communitarianism seems to be somewhat at odds with his equally passionate call for voluntary church membership: the latter seems to give a certain primary role to the autonomous individual.

<sup>102</sup> WS, 18. The new humanity is called elsewhere a 'citizenship, a city, a new creation.' (FN, 87).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. especially RP, 147, no. 3.

<sup>104</sup> FN, 233.

<sup>105</sup> There is a precarious balance in Yoder between characterizing the state as centrally tainted by its violent character and disputing that "...violence is the essence of the state. Rather, it is the *ultima ratio*, its outer edge" (Carter, *Politics*, 163, no. 39).

<sup>106</sup> Ulrich, 'Zeugnis', 151.

den Blick gerückt, dass die christliche Gemeinschaft berufen ist, für diese Polis einzustehen.”<sup>107</sup>

The church then represents an alternative ‘community under authority’: God’s new and, at the same time, original vision for human sociability, in contrast to the ways of a fallen world.

### 3.2.3.2 Critique

In the following section I will evaluate Yoder’s ecclesiology, which stems from his Christology. I will show how Yoder resourced the church with categories to break free from a quietistic and ‘unpolitical’ understanding of being a distinctive minority church. Precisely by embodying the distinctive ethos of Jesus the church is the avant-garde show-case of God’s original ‘political’ vision for the world. On the other hand Yoder cannot and does not consistently follow through the concept of an alternative paradigm. The subversion of standard accounts of rule does not lead to the subversion of all known political structures in an anarchistic or wholly autonomous stance of the church. The church still needs the state – something that is admitted by Yoder somewhat grudgingly.

#### a) Positive

Yoder’s radical ecclesiology has rightly fascinated scholars from within and outside the Mennonite community. Yoder calls for a church that is truly free, not just on an institutional level but in all its actions. This freedom springs from its close and faithful bond with its Lord, who lay down a pattern of humble service and non-violent rule that is not reversed but affirmed by his exaltation. From this bond comes the freedom to be distinctive, not in a notorious attempt to be ‘anti’ but in an attempt to be faithful to Christ, though this attempt likely puts the church in a minority position.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ulrich, ‘Zeugnis’, 154.

<sup>108</sup> According to Thiessen Nation, Yoder increasingly changed his vocabulary from ‘different’ to ‘distinctive’, stating that the point of comparison is not society but Christ (Thiessen Nation, *Yoder*, 157, no. 31).

Though Yoder has no illusions about the problems and squabbles of real existing church communities, he calls emphatically and persistently for an empirical church that offers at least a fragmentary vision and a partial taste of God's vision for humanity.

When Yoder says 'the church' he refers to a tangible community, where ordinary believers interact socially and try to build their communal life together, not to a few spokespeople from among the clergy.

Yoder's insistence that God's redemption in Christ immediately takes a social form and is far from limiting itself to the spiritual realm, is now widely and rightly acknowledged. In this sense Yoder clearly did some pioneering work.

#### **b) Negative**

Despite these convincing aspects questions persist: One might expect, at first sight that the church lives the life of an independent political entity with its own government, partly seen in Christ's invisible Lordship, partly reflected in church offices.<sup>109</sup> This independent and self-sufficient new *polis* could still interact with others, challenging and inspiring them.

But despite impressive statements of Yoder and his interpreters<sup>110</sup>, there is no such independent *polis*. As Yoder himself puts it, the Gospel "proclaimed the institution of a new kind of life, not of a new government."<sup>111</sup> Yoder's adjective 'political' for the church makes sense meaning 'socio-political' but not in the sense of the ordered use of means of temporal power. If Kroeker says that the church "...can *only* be sustained by the Church's doxological identity, shaped by its worship of the God revealed in Christ, it is not sustained by any established or conventional juridical power"<sup>112</sup> this is true of the church's inner life, but on the outside the church is at least given space by conventional political power. Similarly, Doerksen rightly

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<sup>109</sup> Yoder does not say much about authority within the church, as he seeks to present the latter as a thoroughly egalitarian society.

<sup>110</sup> "...the 'body of Christ' is the social carrier of the mind of Christ, a *polis* that represents the rule of God for the nations" (T. Kroeker, 'The War of the Lamb: Postmodernity and Yoder's Eschatological Genealogy of Morals' in Dula-Huebner, *New Yoder*, 70-89 [80]).

<sup>111</sup> RP, 147. Yoder admittedly sometimes toys with the idea of a godly commonwealth and government such as the nearly non-violent 'Holy experiment' of William Penn's colony.

<sup>112</sup> Kroeker, 'War', 81.

recognizes that the church constitutes ‘the sole public sign of God’s work’ in Yoder.<sup>113</sup> Yet he overlooks the fact that Yoder’s churchly *polis* is still dependent on the existence of another one.

The new house of the church still needs the secure space within the city walls, so to speak. Yoder explicitly states the reason for the state’s existence as carving out the social space where the church can fulfil its mission.<sup>114</sup>

This space of a functioning political system is dependent on coercion and violence, as Yoder sees so well.<sup>115</sup> There is a point where it looks as if the state completes the dirty work in order that the church can go ahead with its more noble and peaceful vision. Though Yoder more or less tacitly assumes that the church is still dependent on wider socio-political structures, there is a serious lack of recognition by Yoder that even the most faithful church participates in the tragic ambiguities and unredeemed realities of the old *aeon* simply by making use, either gratefully or grudgingly, of the ‘peace’ that comes partly through force and coercion.<sup>116</sup> Even the Christian who fills only the slots in society that he or she can take up with a clear conscience still relies on the existence and activities of the police force, the judges and jailors. Political institutions cannot be separated so neatly as to make the job of a minister of public transport completely harmless.

Connected with this lacuna is a distinctive lack of gratitude for political institutions. Within the Mennonite tradition, both problems have to be recognised and critically dealt with. Gerhard Schlabach suggests that before resisting corrupted ways of communal living there have to be ways of properly acknowledging and celebrating God’s good gifts in creation: “...the blessing, the *shalom*, the good, or ‘the land’ that God desires to give, yet to do so without defensively and violently hoarding God’s

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<sup>113</sup> Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 190.

<sup>114</sup> This is admittedly not the case in situations of massive state-led persecution, which Anabaptist groups have suffered more than once. But even Yoder does not see this as the normal or desirable case for the existence of the church.

<sup>115</sup> Though Yoder is, at times, willing and even eager to point out that, “what we call government today is by no means only the sword” (PK, 164), he affirms that, “...the sword remains indispensable, even if only as a ‘strange work’ distinct from its real business” (WS, 12, no. 6).

<sup>116</sup> Schuurmann points to this problem by saying that, “...it is unclear whether and how Yoder implicates Christians, who enjoy the benefits of a society based on a coercive state, in the uses of political violence and coercion that make social order and justice possible” (Schuurmann, ‘Vocation’, 267).

blessing.”<sup>117</sup> Through gratefully inhabiting a given social space “[e]ven a pacifist community can find itself dependent upon someone else’s policing efforts, or find it needs to develop its own.”<sup>118</sup>

There is a danger in Yoder’s ecclesiology that it does not properly acknowledge that the church is indebted to the state in many ways, despite the former’s independent and distinctive shape. Yoder’s fear of an uncritical support of political institutions by the church and his insistence on a distinctive and, most likely, counter-cultural church can make it unnecessarily hard to acknowledge and celebrate common ground with other institutions and communities in society.

### **3.2.4 The Church and the State in the Eschatological Age**

#### **3.2.4.1 Analysis**

Like in O’Donovan Christ is and is not a ruler. He establishes a political society, the church, which has a tangibly socio-political existence with recognisable social practices. However, this political society goes against the basic instincts of other communities by replacing rule and domination with service and humility.

In the next section I will show how Yoder pictures patterns of interaction between the church and wider society, in particular the state. I will show that even within Yoder’s most refined and thoughtful proposals he struggles with an enormous tension: Because the church is like other communities it can address them. Because it draws on resources and paradigms which are ‘out of this world’ there are limits put on this communication. More so, the *reason* why the church should call the state prophetically to Christological obedience is very hard to understand, if Christ by definition sets a paradigm of rule that undermines standard accounts of political rule and shows them to be fundamentally incommensurable with his rule.

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<sup>117</sup> G. W. Schlabach, ‘Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What Is the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics?’ in Hauerwas-Huebner-Theissen *Nation, Wisdom*, 449- 471.

<sup>118</sup> Schlabach, ‘Deuteronomic’, 465. Similarly J. Reimer, ‘A Positive Theology of Law’ in B. C. Ollenburger and G. Gerber Koontz, eds., *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder’s Contribution to Theology, Ethics and Peacemaking* (Telford: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 245-273.

After summing up Yoder's vision in 3.2.4.1. I will briefly evaluate positively his proposals in 3.2.4.2.a) and touch upon some of the difficulties under various headings in 3.2.4.2.b).

**a) Patient endurance**

In many cases, especially in his earlier writings, Yoder advocates patient endurance as the appropriate stance for the church vis-à-vis the state. "We thus accept it, let it be, subordinate ourselves to the fact of the sword, without its being morally normative for ourselves, either in the sense of divine institution or in that of a call to us to guide our discipleship."<sup>119</sup> Yoder calls this the "...*broad acceptance of what is in principle unacceptable*..."<sup>120</sup> The state is both under God's providential and ordering hand, as well as under the Lordship of Christ. In this knowledge, to abstain from involvement in politics can very well be the order of the day for believers. They submit to whatever state there is while obeying God more than political authority. Statements of Yoder that Christians are not responsible for the outcome of history and not responsible for preventing evil belong here. Christ is mysteriously in charge and the church need not worry about not joining the history makers.

**b) Calling the state towards restraint**

The faithful church does not turn its back on society though, looking only to Christ and to the eschatological consummation. Though there is a fundamental duality between, on the one hand, the dealings and ways of the state where faith cannot be presupposed and Christ is not confessed as Lord, and, on the other hand, the church, the Christians have something to say to the state, precisely alongside this duality. Christians are to call the state (back) to its limited eschatological mission as the servant of the church. Yoder's worry is not primarily that the state falls into religious hubris but that it oversteps its work of limited police actions and a very restrained use of violence. War and revolution disrupt the fabric of society, and, in this, the state turns its original task on its head. The church quite legitimately protests against such excesses, which badly affect its own witness too. In this strand of Yoder's thinking, the Christian task is not to make the state more Christian but to make it more

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<sup>119</sup> Yoder, "'Patience' ...", in Hauerwas-Huebner-Theissen Nation, *Wisdom*, 29.

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas-Huebner-Theissen Nation, *Wisdom*, 29., my emphasis.

modest.<sup>121</sup> The state is asked to act according to human *iustitia*, not to Christian righteousness.<sup>122</sup> “We need to distinguish between the ethics of discipleship which are laid upon every Christian believer by virtue of his very confession of faith, and an ethic of justice within the limits of relative prudence and self-preservation, which is all one can ask of the larger society.”<sup>123</sup> In such statements, Yoder comes astonishingly close to O’Donovan’s proposal of a state that makes a gesture of self-limitation in the light of Christ. Why not grant then, that the state runs – within limits – according to its own rules, due to the general sinfulness of people? Why not go for a free church version of some sort of Augustinian dialectic: here we have the state, which is part of the old *aeon*, yet engaged and addressed by the church, there we have the church which bears witness to the new *aeon*, yet depends on the social space created by the state? To a degree, Yoder pursues such lines.<sup>124</sup> But on the whole, Yoder does not want to define a tolerable minimum state. He is too much concerned that the church would bless a double standard of ethics.

### c)      **Calling the state towards the eschatological good**

Especially in his later works, Yoder is discontented with the idea that the state merely has to show modesty and a civic decency that is different from Christian discipleship. Instead, he insists that the church is to call the state more towards the eschatological reality. This can happen through prophetic protest or by providing positive models on the part of the church: “Its very existence is subversive at the points where the old order is repressive and creative where the old is without vision.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> “We do not ask of the government that it be non-resistant; we do, however, ask that it take the most just and the least violent action possible” WS, 42.

<sup>122</sup> RP, 56.

<sup>123</sup> WS, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Though Yoder himself does not seem to be inspired by Augustine and often mentions him critically as one of the architects of Constantinianism (e.g. RP, 89), Schlabach draws interesting parallels between Yoder and Augustine, such as their focus on eschatology, the central role of the church and the strange mixture of pessimism and optimism (G. W. Schlabach, ‘The Christian Witness in the Earthly City: John Howard Yoder as Augustinian Interlocutor’ in Dula-Huebner, eds., *New Yoder*, 18-42 (35).

<sup>125</sup> FN, 84.

As much as Yoder affirms the duality between church and world, as much he speaks out against a 'stable duality'<sup>126</sup> along the lines of 'war is wrong for us and right for them'.<sup>127</sup> In some of his essays he seems to instinctively redress the balance over against such duality and to make strong claims that the state must be confronted with nothing less than Kingdom values and actually called *qua state* to follow them as much as possible. While in other texts Yoder emphasizes that it is futile to call the state to an eschatological behaviour because there is the dichotomy of confession, he sometimes stresses that the state must be subject to the full Christian critique.<sup>128</sup>

Wider society and the church share the same calling and are under the same Lord. Paradoxically, this can both lead to a 'let it be' attitude as well as to active Christian involvement in politics. Because of Christ's wider Lordship, state and society must be addressed and confronted with the vision of the Kingdom. The state is not part of the Kingdom but it must be constantly *harassed* by the Kingdom, without being completely *harnessed* to it. The church, while it has no ideal or template of a good state, still has a vision of redeemed communal life, which is relentlessly held before the state, both through the church's existence and its direct address to the state. Yoder's emphasis changes from the dichotomy to the continuum that exists between church and state/society. Both share precisely the same vocation: "The believing community is the new world on the way."<sup>129</sup> "The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately."<sup>130</sup>

Yoder gives a lot of thought to the shape of Christian involvement in politics that is congruent with the church's vocation and character. Normally, prophetic protest and the redress of wrongs happen very much *ad hoc*, 'one at a time'. One of Yoder's foremost interpreters, Mark Thiessen Nation, sums it up like this: "And we [the church] with means that are consistent with our identity as Christians and with the

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<sup>126</sup> FN, 158.

<sup>127</sup> In this point Yoder challenges the traditional attitude of vocational pacifism of "...the older pre-Yoder generation of thinkers who continued to believe in a strong state, ordained by God to punish the evil and protect the good in the world, but a state quite separate from the church, which is called to follow Christ nonviolently" (Reimer, 'Positive Theology', 255).

<sup>128</sup> The civil realm must not be "kept free to follow its own rules" (FN, 84). "There is no special realm of 'politics' which Christians, or the church, can avoid and leave to its own resources, or leave to be run by its own rules" (FN, 111).

<sup>129</sup> FN, 50.

<sup>130</sup> PK, 92.



claims of the gospel seek to speak to the powers that be in ways that move the world's actions closer to those that would be faithful to the gospel. We do not project a utopia toward which we expect the world to move. Rather, one issue at a time, we call upon the government or powerful agencies to be more just, less oppressive and violent. There are always particular injustices, particular wars, particular acts of abuse to which we can direct our critique and engage our energies.”<sup>131</sup>

Yoder also thinks carefully about the problem of translation. He is fairly optimistic that the church can find a language to communicate its distinctive message to the wider world. Sometimes it just seems to be possible to fully reformulate a Christian conviction in secular or even “pagan terms (liberty, equality, fraternity, education, democracy, human rights).”<sup>132</sup> Sometimes Yoder goes even further, stating that desirable practices can rely on a variety of worldviews:

Eucharist... is the paradigm for every other mode of inviting the outsider and the underdog to the table, whether we call that the epistemological privilege of the oppressed or cooperation or equal opportunity or socialism. To make such sharing seem natural, it helps to have gone through an exodus or a Pentecost together, but neither the substance nor the pertinence of the vision is dependent on a particular faith.<sup>133</sup>

In other places Yoder reflects on the necessity of retaining an irreducible and challenging element in the translation process. In his earlier work, Yoder suggests exploring a third space between what he calls ‘marketplace semantics’ and the internal language of the church.<sup>134</sup> This third space, or ‘middle axioms’, resembles a toned down challenge issued from the church’s perspective to wider society. “If the marketplace states that you cannot ask moral heroism of everyone, the church, which asks love of all its members, would reply that, ‘you can ask civility of almost everybody.’”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Thiessen Nation, *Yoder*, 136.

<sup>132</sup> WS, 73.

<sup>133</sup> FN, 32.

<sup>134</sup> Yoder famously used the term ‘middle axiom’ (WS, 72). The term disappeared later on from Yoder’s writings (Weaver, ‘Second Generation’, 470).

<sup>135</sup> PK, 161,

Yoder emphasizes both the distinctiveness of the church and its worldliness. There is nothing mystical or esoteric about the church's practices. They are instantly intelligible even for the outsider and therefore have the potential to inspire, precisely through the twist they give to ordinary things: eating is the opportunity for sharing, membership is the point where equality is enacted, conflict resolution is taken seriously but done in a spirit of non-violence.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.2.4.2 Critique

#### a) Positive

Yoder's great achievement is on the one hand to defend traditional Anabaptist ethics over against the charge of irresponsibility. Yoder challenges the perception that it is the Christian's duty to be involved in public life at all times and in all situations. In that sense, he changed the question by stating that Christians are called to witness to God's eschatological deed, not to assume responsibility for making history come out right. But then, Yoder has become famous not as the great apostle of quietism, but as one of the single most influential figures for the promotion of Kingdom ethics in the arena of politics, encouraging an entire generation of left-wing evangelicals.<sup>137</sup> He encouraged Christians to imagine that the distinctive ethics of Jesus could and should be sought after, lobbied for and fought for in the political realm in a way that was congruent with Jesus' pattern. He assumed, in other words, that the faithful and non-violent church could and should engage the state proactively and confidently. He thereby challenged the view that a non-violent stance condemns a group or an individual to political passivity.

#### b) Negative

Despite these achievements there remain some unresolved difficulties and tensions in Yoder's proposal to which I will turn now.

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<sup>136</sup> Cf. Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, 109-117.

<sup>137</sup> "Yoder was among the architects of [the] new platform of Mennonite social involvement and their intentional and constructive association of peacemaking/peacebuilding with justice" (Obiewke, 'Nonviolent Resistance', 116).

On the whole, the state is in a most uncomfortable position in Yoder's various proposals. It must not interfere with the church but humbly serve it. It must never presumptuously think it can be part of the *eschaton*, yet at times, at least, it is confronted with the full critique of Kingdom values. It is held accountable by the church "to standards the state cannot fully understand."<sup>138</sup> There is no level of minimal justice where it can comfortably settle but always infinitely new demands which push the state towards a goal which it is nonetheless neither able nor permitted to ever reach. That the Christian faith makes life difficult for the state could be seen as inevitable and healthy in the long run. Yoder himself recognizes this tension and labels it helpfully as 'Duality without dualism'.<sup>139</sup> But sometimes, Yoder's views seem to mutually annul each other, and even the sympathetic mainstream reader cannot help but feel some confusion and frustration. The state is, at the same time, indispensable, unbearable and open to reform from the eschatological perspective. This is, of course, not *per se* an impossible view in a complex world. Some questions persist, which I want to organize under three main headings:

### **Lost in translation?**

Yoder's suggestions on how to translate the distinctive Christian message for the world make good sense and have an instant rational appeal. Yoder's distinctive and intriguing feature is again that he holds up consistently the semantic priority of the church. The church will always take its cue from Jesus and the Christ narrative, instead of trying to fit this narrative into some meta-narrative of the surrounding world. There is no need to define a grammar for the other side or to define a common ground of created structures or to seek *a priori* definitions, according to Yoder.

Tension arises in that the Gospel is sometimes in danger of being reduced to a universal ethical principle, which may be illustrated and reached from different angles, a move Yoder himself combats in one place as "the fallacy of moralism".<sup>140</sup> Yoder's initial insistence that the particular narrative of Jesus and the conscious confession of Christ as Lord is key to everything, seems to be somewhat watered

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<sup>138</sup> Harder, 'Dichotomy', 232.

<sup>139</sup> WS, 31. Yoder's language softened or got more precise over the years: "'Dualism', which was a term he used positively in 1954, had already shifted to 'duality' by 1964 and would often give way to even less firmly oppositional language" (Thiessen Nation, *Yoder*, 167).

<sup>140</sup> WS, 29.

down when the Eucharist is seen as one illustration among many for the paradigm of sharing.

If the Gospel can be fully expressed in secular terms, how does the church distinguish genuine family resemblances in the world with its own message, from autonomous and idolatrous mimicking?<sup>141</sup> Can the ethics and politics of Jesus suddenly be generalized and abstracted from their all-decisive narrative and Christological context?<sup>142</sup>

Even if we grant that somehow a meaningful conversation is possible between the people of the new age and the people of the old *aeon* without the former generalizing their message, we wonder on what grounds we can expect non-believers or even political institutions to approximate Kingdom values. If "...Yoder's view of sin seems to be pervasive, given his suspicion of the function of ideologies of power,"<sup>143</sup> what makes him hope that people and structures, who are not convinced and converted members of the new covenant, can act and walk in the new ways of the Spirit? Where are the ontological resources to give substance to such a hope?<sup>144</sup>

Schlabach points to this 'Leerstelle' when he writes:

Despite renouncing natural law principles built into human nature and social life, Yoder did want to affirm that 'there exists a level of human values, not specifically Christian but somehow subject to Christian formative influences, where the real movement of history takes place' (WS, 57). What are those 'human values'? What is that 'level'? What constitutes the 'human'? Logically, Yoder still needed *some* theology of creation.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Yoder is very much aware of either possibility when he talks about the "deceptive and partial coincidence between the gospel's hope and the optimism of the West" (FN, 142).

<sup>142</sup> Yoder himself is critically aware of this problem and states that the name of Jesus cannot just be replaced for instance by 'freedom' (FN, 121).

<sup>143</sup> Carter, *Politics*, 161, no. 27.

<sup>144</sup> Carter suggests that the church confidently talks to the government by saying: "Do such and such. We do it all the time, and it is, therefore, perfectly realistic" (Carter, *Politics*, 211). Both Yoder and Carter find the Barthian concept of analogies between state and church very plausible (ibid., 213). It is not fully understandable why the pagan state, which "is not addressable by the gospel directly..." (ibid., 213) can still produce analogies to ecclesial practices with such ease.

<sup>145</sup> Schlabach, 'Earthly City', 38. Budziszewski's sharp criticism that "redemption means the redemption of creation" (Budziszewski, *Evangelicals*, 105, emphasis original) is, however, unfair on Yoder. Yoder certainly sees the scope of redemption as including the whole of creation, though his

### **Cruciform intervention or preservation of creation?**

Yoder's reservation against permanent links between the church and the state, his preference for the critical prophetic voice over against the affirming chaplains, and his advice for impromptu interventions, can all combine to be overly forgetful of the daily business of states which also is about managing resources and running processes of communal life and communal welfare. Is a Christian witness credible in the long run which seems so focussed on prophetic protest and is reluctant to share in the daily burden of the task of kings, so to speak, perhaps, at the appropriate moment, even in the role of the priest? In Schlabach's words the peace church must "eventually take on the challenges not only of faithful critique, but of faithful settling, faithful institution-building, and faithful management of community life..."<sup>146</sup> Upon a closer reading, it becomes clear that Yoder fully embraces Christian involvement in peaceful governmental activities which serve wider society. To have the stage set for the church's mission is not the only motive for the Christian witness to the state, it is equally love for one's neighbour.<sup>147</sup> But again, Yoder's tight trajectory, from the cross to the church to constructive involvement in wider society, makes such affirmations look like an after-thought. If the starting point of all political thinking and actions by the church is consistently located in the non-conformist servanthood of Jesus, which implies with necessity his antagonistic stance towards the rulers of his day and his subsequent helpless suffering, it is somewhat difficult to arrive at a more affirming and cooperative stance towards political institutions. Joel Zimbelmann hints in this direction when he says that, "If both non-resistance and neighbour welfare are taken to be the most authentic manifestations of Christ's lordship, it is difficult to see why fulfilling the demands of non-resistance ought categorically to take priority over the demands of neighbour welfare – and by extension distributive justice."<sup>148</sup>

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emphasis is more on the new creation, which slowly gains room among the old rather than on the affirmation and renewal of created structures as such.

<sup>146</sup> Schlabach, 'Deuteronomic', 465.

<sup>147</sup> Schlabach points out well that 'the church's mission' and 'love of neighbour' are both the double motives for Augustine and Yoder to seek the peace of the earthly city (Schlabach, 'Earthly City', 36).

<sup>148</sup> Zimbelmann, 'Contribution', 387.

### **Pursuing a forbidden goal?**

The church is the new world on its way. And, as such, it happily invites people and institutions outside the church to join its march of hope and to head in the same direction.

There is something unlimited in this vision. Could it be – just in theory – that the world becomes like the church? Could it be that the church fully conquers the rulers of this world, as in O'Donovan's narrative? Can the state become part of the eschatological narrative?

Yoder would presumably dismiss the first question as speculative and academic – the problem is not, after all, that the world was ever too much like the church but that it was not nearly enough like the church. Concerning the second one there are some interesting reflections in *The Priestly Kingdom* where Yoder is willing to explore the possibility of a truly Christian emperor for a while. He is clearly not comfortable with that image at all.<sup>149</sup> It remains an open question to me, whether the Christianization of an entire society, including its power elite, is principally and theologically wrong for Yoder, or whether it is just a dangerous game, as experience shows that the potential and temptation of corruption is rather high.<sup>150</sup> The issue of 'success' is a thorny one in Yoder's worldview. There seems to be something inherently problematic with a church that manages to become the majority, let alone a church that manages to win over the rulers or the 'establishment' of a society.<sup>151</sup>

Even if Yoder could imagine a faithful majority just in theory, he obviously thinks that the state cannot become part of the eschatological narrative. It can never become a major agent of that narrative because it is, by definition, bound up with the old *aeon*.

In a sense, the greatest failure of the church would be to be completely successful. It must never quite succeed in winning institutions or representatives of political power

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. section 'What if there had been a stronger faith?' PK, 145-146.

<sup>150</sup> Carter stretches the evidence when he claims that, "...Yoder did not rule out the Christendom idea *a priori* ..." (Carter, *Politics*, 156). The overwhelming impression in Yoder's writings is that he welcomes the end of the historical Christendom period as liberating for the church.

<sup>151</sup> "...the only way in which the faith can become the official ideology of a power elite in a given society is if Jesus Christ ceases to be concretely Lord" (Yoder, PK, 85).

for its own cause, because “[t]he state is not a means by which God brings his kingdom into history.”<sup>152</sup>

This certainly puts some brakes on the unlimited vision of hope previously stated.

Precisely where is the transition from encouraging the state to embody proto-eschatological values, to discouraging it from becoming eschatological itself in a perverted sense?

Somewhere there is something self-defeating lurking:

Because the state is busy ordering communal life, it can be addressed by the church which engages in the same project. But, because the state orders communal life by un-Christian means, cooperation is limited. Because Jesus Christ is the Lord over the state as well, the lords of this world can be addressed in his name. But, because Jesus Christ subverts and deconstructs the concept of ‘lording’ as such, the conversation is somewhat at cross purposes right from the start. Engaging the state with Kingdom values is pulling it in the direction of a reality of which it is never permitted to become part. This enormous tension might well bring us to the heart of the matter: is it really the state’s vocation to become more like the church? Where in the New Testament is it the church’s project to engage the state in this way? Yoder is at his best when he argues *how* pacifism can have a significant socio-political impact. But he cannot make it fully clear *why* the church should wrest the sword from the hand of the state or admonish the state to use it in less frequent and less devastating ways in the first place.<sup>153</sup> His greatest achievement of making a way for pacifist Christians in politics has, at the same time, serious flaws.

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<sup>152</sup> Carter, *Politics*, 150. Maybe the deeper reason for Yoder’s problems with success lies in his Christology. Yoder’s Christ is rarely seen as victorious or triumphant. If “the cross is neither foolish nor weak, but natural” (FN, 212) and if the “cross is... the Kingdom come” (PJ, 51), then the resurrection and exaltation is nothing more than the divine *placet*. The paradoxical nature of Christ’s Lordship makes it almost impossible to speak of him as a Lord with real power. Yoder brings out well how Christ’s abiding love *subverts* the reality of suffering and sin. He is less able to point to the *overcoming* of suffering and sin. Despite his best intentions Yoder’s view of the cross might lead to a glorification of suffering and failure as such.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Yoder’s own statement: “The sword is to be avoided by believers and left, as in the New Testament times, in the hands of pagan Caesars” (PK, 107). This seems to be in tension with his involvement in the American peace movement.

### 3.2.5 Summary

Summing up our observations we can say:

- Yoder talks about the ‘political’ as the attempt of human beings to organise community life. His thinking centers very much on the vision of a redeemed, peaceful and flourishing community. Unlike O’Donovan he does not very much correlate community life (the socio-political) with political authority (the political understood as rule or governance). Yoder is initially suspicious of political authority, with the latter’s inbuilt approval and use of means of coercion and domination. Political *authority* is always in danger of destroying political *life*.
- In Christ God reveals the true non-violent human being. Christ constitutes the new vision of a healed and reconciled community by constituting the church. This community reveals the true ‘political’ that will become a universal reality in the eschatological consummation.
- This community is constituted, sustained and marked by its Lord, Jesus Christ. Christ’s Lordship must be heeded and obeyed in the church. However, this Lordship is strictly non-coercive and non-dominating. Christ rules graciously and his pattern of suffering servanthood is the abiding ethos for his church.
- Christ thus both deploys and at the same time transforms the standard notion of political authority. More than that Christ almost *subverts* notions of political authority. He is not merely a very different Lord, he is the Lord challenging all concepts of ‘lording’.
- In view of this transposed or even subverted concept of Lordship and authority all standard political authority looks deeply wanting. There is no minimal level where their activities can be given approval from a Christian perspective because they are always under the critique of the ‘Lord against lording’, Christ, who is Lord not only over the church but over the cosmos. The authorities are in no position to ever fully please Christ. Even less are



they to mediate Christ's Lordship, because that would be like expressing fire through water.

- The church, which embodies the altogether different paradigm of the redeemed 'political' by following its Lord who sets an altogether different if not paradoxical paradigm of 'lording', does *not* distance itself from all forms of political life, which seem wanting in the light of Christ. The church is not permitted to mediate the Lordship of Christ in its life through some vice-regent of Christ and therefore to become 'political' like other communities. On the other hand, because of this under-politicized status it still needs the structures of the wider political world and the space of safety the latter carve out.
- The church oscillates between leaving political authority to run their wholly different political 'game' and calling them to approximate the church's eschatological paradigm. In a first figure of Yoder's thought the church is only called to represent as creatively and faithfully as possible Christ's at presently hidden 'rule', read as Christ's ethical paradigm, which will eventually prevail. In a second figure of thought the church is called to engage the political world and pull it towards Christ's ethos, because Christ is Lord of the universe.
- Because Yoder's notion of Christ's rule oscillates so much between something that is on a different plane from standard political authority and something that is on a comparable level with the rulers of this world and therefore engages and confronts them, the interaction of the church similarly oscillates between needing and not needing the state, between rejecting its use of violence and constraint and supporting its efforts to give a space of security to communities, between calling the state to modest ethics and encouraging the state to display maximum features of Christ's Kingdom.

O'Donovan and Yoder obviously struggle with similar issues which are connected to their complex use of the metaphor of 'Christ the Lord' which oscillates between more spiritual and more literal levels, between affirming, transposing and subverting

notions of rule. In the next 'Interlude' chapter I will offer a fuller and clearer outline of these tensions.

## **4. Interlude: From O'Donovan's and Yoder's Political Theologies to the Pauline Texts**

Before we proceed to the exegetical part of this thesis I would like to pause for a moment and list again the four important issues or thematic fields that have crystallized during the description and analysis of O'Donovan's and Yoder's respective proposals. As we have seen these four fields include 1.) What is the "political" 2.) In what way is Jesus Christ Lord? 3.) In what way is the church a political society? and 4.) What interaction can be expected between church and state/political authorities in the eschatological age?

As I have already explained in the Introduction I have used these four thematic fields already as interpretative categories to analyze the political theology of O'Donovan and Yoder. On the other hand they have grown out of my reading of these two authors in the first place.

In this section I will give some more texture to each one of these thematic fields we have identified as important. As we have seen, both Yoder and O'Donovan do not just give one stable answer or account for each of the four themes. Instead they seem to offer sometimes variable accounts along a range of possible answers. I will highlight this range, and the variability of answers in the course of this chapter.

Moving on to the exegetical part, the four thematic fields will serve as useful interpretative categories. They will serve as heuristic tools to ask the Pauline texts important questions. The interpretative options discussed in the previous chapters will be crystallized in this bridging chapter, and will serve as points of reference at strategic points in my detailed exegetical study. I will ask to what extent Paul's thinking can be mapped on to the structures that O'Donovan and Yoder provide: Where does Paul settle within the range of possible interpretations? Where is he silent? Where does he give a surprising answer that departs altogether from Yoder's and O'Donovan's discourse? To what extent does Paul challenge the very terms of the questions, put variously by Yoder and O'Donovan?

## 4.1 What is the ‘political’?

Both Yoder and O’Donovan point out the political character of the Gospel. They are keen to point out that the Christian narrative is not (just) about spiritual, individual or other-worldly realities.

In answering the question what the ‘political’ is O’Donovan and Yoder operate with two major notions: The ‘political’ can have a very broad meaning of every joint human effort to structure and organize community life. It can also have a more narrow meaning of a specified agency which acts on behalf of a certain community, using means of coercion and power, creating and shaping legal and economic structures and performing varying functions addressed to that community.

As we have seen, both authors use both meanings of ‘political’ but correlate them in quite different ways (see above 2.2.5 and 3.2.5).

For the discussion of the Pauline texts it will be important to bear in mind the breadth of meaning surrounding the word ‘political’. We have to distinguish the broad use of the word ‘political’ as ‘socio-political’ where general attempts of community organization are envisaged, from ‘political’ as ‘political authority’ when we refer to specified agencies, who manage to get hold of and to make use of means of temporal power such as making laws, commanding instruments of physical coercion, and being able to extract and use funds from a certain community. When talking about the latter I will mostly use the term ‘political authority’ borrowed from O’Donovan, because of the anachronistic overtones of ‘state’ already mentioned. O’Donovan’s term is tendentious insofar as it has already an inherently positive view of political power that displays a degree of legitimacy. Despite this disadvantage I find the term more useful than most others.<sup>1</sup> I would however like to stress that it is of secondary

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<sup>1</sup>The most comprehensive term is of course ‘political power’. For the purpose of this thesis I will restrict myself to the clear agents of political rule, either earthly or spiritual ones, and to the communities sponsored or hindered by them. The fascinating study of all-pervasive and implicit power structures even among the ‘powerless’, often inspired by Foucault’s work, would be the theme for another thesis. For some scholarly voices, who make such impulses fruitful for a reading of Paul cf. B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978); Marchal, *Politics*; E.A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

importance for my definition whether political agencies or agents manage to exert authority through sheer force, or legitimized processes, or a mixture of both. 'Political authority' will refer to 'the rulers of this world' as Paul would probably have called them - as they were and are experienced throughout much of human history, albeit in very varying forms. This experience could be more or less beneficial (as O'Donovan points out) or more or less harrowing (as Yoder emphasizes). Both aspects have to be borne in mind when we assess how Paul evaluated political authority.

For the purpose of this thesis it will be of special interest to see how Paul maps out the relationship between socio-political communities and political authority, as the categories further below (4.2.: 'Christ the Lord' and 4.3.: 'The Church as a Political Society') will show.

When turning to the Pauline texts it will be worthwhile to try to capture Paul's assessment of political authority, and to see in what contexts the basic tenor is positive or alternatively negative. Both on the emotional and the cognitive level more than one response seems possible for a Christian author who uses political language, none of which must be prematurely precluded on principle.

## **4.2 Christ the Lord**

A second field of inquiry which emerges from my dialogue with O'Donovan and Yoder is Christ's Lordship.

O'Donovan sees Christ as the fulfilment of Davidic hopes, though in a transposed key: Christ was publicly affirmed as Lord of all, though this is at present a hidden reality (cf. 2.1.3.2). It will become fully real at the eschatological consummation. Yoder sees Christ rather in discontinuity than in continuity with Old Testament theocracy hopes. Christ affirms the Diaspora existence of the people of God, which can do without nation, land or king (3.1.3.1). Both authors reflect on the complex trajectory between Jesus' earthly ministry, his victory over death and evil in his cross and resurrection, and his final eschatological triumph. O'Donovan emphasizes

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Christ's power, both in his earthly ministry and as the exalted Lord. The earthly Jesus empowers people, his is a commanding authority both in word and action (cf. 2.1.3.1.c). Between the resurrection and the parousia the world is propelled towards Christ's ultimate *victory*. Because of this, everybody and in particular rulers have to be confronted with the Gospel and to be asked to submit to the Lord of all (2.1.3.2; 2.1.3.3.b). Christ's ultimate victory legitimately translates into some proleptic glimpses in the world of political authority, albeit in an indirect fashion.

O'Donovan's Christ then *transforms* notions of Lordship and rule: Christ saves his people, though not through an army but through mighty gestures of healing and exorcisms. He commands, but not with laws and courts but in the power of the Spirit and in truth. He brings about God's final judgment in his own death and resurrection. He is in a sense *more than victorious* because of his ultimate defeat of death (cf. 2.1.3.1.c); 2.1.3.2.a). At present Christ's rule is invisible and though it stretches over those outside the realm of faith it is not as real for them as it is for the church. Still, O'Donovan's Christ does not subvert notions of rule but somehow *affirms* them. Rulers are not bad because they do not humbly suffer and serve. Instead they reflect a positive aspect of God's design, namely to generate community through authority (cf. 2.1.3.1.). This design has been fulfilled rather than abolished in Christ. Still, in view of Christ's all-embracing rule there is no space left for a comprehensive earthly rule that saves, protects communal traditions and renders judgment. The rule of Christ, while affirming the concept of rule and authority, also seems to *limit* the reach and scope of earthly rule (2.1.3.3. c). However, in certain moments we see that Christ seems through the church to address willing and obedient rulers, encouraging them to *improve* their rule by e.g. giving merciful judgment (cf. 2.2.3.2.a).

Yoder is much more preoccupied with the character of Christ's Lordship, which in his view bears the abiding mark of the suffering servant. Christ's greatest triumph happens when he forgives his enemies at the cross (3.1.2.2). After this climax Yoder has some difficulties to give the resurrection its proper weight. The resurrection certainly is the triumph and seal of approval of God's humble way of service, not the reversal thereof (3.2.2.1 c). It gains momentum in the world as the church – in the power of the Spirit and in the hope of the future consummation – acts non-violently and lovingly. Christ's Lordship then is not least a *normative* concept, rendering humble and suffering service as binding for anyone who follows the Lord of the

universe (3.1.2.2). Yoder strongly highlights the *paradoxical* character of rule as embodied by Jesus: Christ is strong in weakness and victorious in suffering. This notion of rule constantly borders on the *subversion* of notions of earthly rule and authority. Political authority is not just to be improved or tempered by mercy and kindness, but the very concept is shown up as wanting in the light of Christ.

Common ideas of success and influence are completely subverted by the suffering Christ. Can political rule still be addressed meaningfully by Christ if their activities tend to be stood on their head so very quickly? Yoder affirms this. On the whole, though, he struggles with the idea of an obedient ruler. Rulers who submit to Christ in a sense have to stop being rulers (cf. 3.2.4.2. b) Pursuing a forbidden goal?)

Both authors agree that Christ's rule is reflected and expressed first and foremost in the church, though O'Donovan would want to add the indirect reflection of the chastigated state.

Both authors agree that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the entire world.

Both authors emphatically reject any notion of direct *mediation* of Christ's Lordship in terms of earthly rule.

Reading Paul's text it will be important to ask how Paul describes Christ Lordship and rule. We will explore how Paul *transposes* political titles and imagery he associates with Christ. We will ask how Christ's humble suffering is linked with the resurrection and exaltation and how this is connected with expectations of a final victory. We will have to ask questions about Christ's scope and reach of rule, and how Christ the Lord *interacts* with the 'rulers of this world' in Paul's narrative. Are they *affirmed* or *subverted*? Can they assist Christ or be transformed by him or do they have to give way before this ultimate Lord?

### **4.3 The Church as a Political Society**

Both Yoder and O'Donovan draw attention to the church as a political society. In both authors this is not just a sociological insight that all empirical groups share in certain structures but a theological statement. It captures fully or partially the promise of the eschatologically renewed humankind (2.1.3.3 a); 3.1.3.1). The church embodies, represents and reflects the Lordship of Christ most directly. It is a free

community under rule and authority with a distinctive character. It can never be dissolved into the rest of society. Even in O'Donovan's best case of a society become Christian and rulers become obedient the church is not coextensive with society and must retain its distinctive character. For Yoder the distinctiveness is crucial, too, and will likely lead to the sociological form of the church as a voluntary minority group. To be different is almost the *raison d'être* for the church.

Even though the church is strongly presented as 'political' under the gracious authority of Christ neither author ever suggests that the church becomes a fully politicized group, autonomous and self-sufficient within the world. O'Donovan explicitly reflects on this possibility and rejects it, because the church must wait for the eschatological consummation, when it will become the holy city together with Israel and the earthly cities. In his view church and state accept their limited tasks and forms of existence precisely in order to keep that eschatological horizon open by pointing to it in a partly dialectical, partly complementary form (cf. 2.2.3.1).

In contrast Yoder does not pay a lot of attention to the fact that the church is at present not a fully politicized society and therefore will always rely on some sort of co-existence and even tacit complicity with political systems of this world. Because Yoder's church represents the true 'political' that is so much at odds with what the world calls 'political' - coercion, domination, safety through violence – it would be a severe betrayal for the church to become some kind of nation or city along the lines of earthly rule. Yoder propagates the 'political' (the peacefully ordered community) that ideally can do without the 'political' (the means of forceful constraint). At the same time he re-ordains the 'political' in the sense of the state as the servant of the church, the true 'political'. The state, which embodies fundamentally wrong notions of rule still has to carve out a space of security for the church (3.2.4.1.b).

In the exegetical part it will be important to investigate in what ways Paul describes the church as a political body. Interesting pointers here will be O'Donovan's concept of the church as a political 'community under authority' yet as a 'politically underdressed' society and Yoder's view of the church as the embodiment of alternative or rather true politics. We will have to ask in what way the church is pictured as a political society or even as *the* political society. We will have to ask whether Paul uses socio-political images for the church to underline its corporate or



obedient character or whether he consciously deploys them to compare or contrast it with other political communities. We also have to ask whether Paul makes a move at certain times to render the church completely self-sufficient and in some ways fully politicized.

## 4.4 Church and State in the Eschatological Age

Pulling together previous observations we ask how Church and State interact in the time after Christ. What space and roles do they take up on the eschatological map, sketched out by the Christ event?

Both O'Donovan and Yoder make an attempt to answer this question.

O'Donovan follows the lead of theologians who see political authority as providential and limited to this age. Because it is instituted as a remedy for the fall, political authority has something *ambiguous*, although O'Donovan emphasizes its goodness more than its problematic sides (2.2.1.1 a). Political authority has a temporal and *modest* role (2.2.1.1.b). He has, however, a strand in his thinking that would want both to root aspects of political authority in the created order and redeem and transform them for eternity. Political authority can become *transformed* (2.2.1.1.c).

Yoder sees political authority mostly as a reality which participates in the fall. The *bad* state makes a frequent appearance in Yoder (3.2.1.1a). He sometimes reluctantly sees political institutions as part of creation. Political authority is a highly *ambiguous* entity: It can make the reality of sin more bearable and is at the same time prone to be influenced and hijacked by the reality of sin (3.2.1.1 b). Because of this ambiguous or mixed character, with a tendency towards the sins of violence the state has to be reminded of its *modest* role in the eschatological drama. It is on principle excluded from being a major actor in that drama and the worst mistake would be to let earthly rulers reign on behalf of Christ (3.2.1.1 c). On the other hand, Christ's Lordship and his commanding new norms of non-violent service challenges the whole world, including the world of politics. Political authority can be *challenged* and *transformed* (3.2.1.1.d).

Both authors seek ways to link political authority/the state with the Christ narrative. It seems to be unthinkable that this area of human existence remains untouched by Christ's work and victory. Both authors have a heightened sensitivity for the Lordship of Christ which reaches beyond the church.

But what has changed? Both authors agree in some places that Christ has conquered the powers that be, which include political rulers and their corresponding spiritual forces. Political authority is not the same after Christ's victory (2.1.3.2). Its normal business has become problematic in the light of Christ's transformed notion of rule, and in the light of Christ's comprehensive claim as ruler of all. At the same time there are new Christological rationales for the continued existence of political authority and political rule.

The foremost rationale is the enabling of the *mission of the church*. This view can take a 'thinner' or 'thicker' form: In the first case the state just provides a functioning social space for the church, which the latter gratefully acknowledges while it submits to the state. In the second case, political authority is enlisted as conscious enabler of the church's mission, though in a merely indirect form, by paying its respects and lending its support to the church's leaders. This is supported by O'Donovan, but rejected by Yoder. The third possibility, that the rulers further the mission of the church *qua* rulers with all their available means is excluded by both authors (cf. 2.2.4. and 3.2.4).

Other rationales are that political authority can either indirectly heed or directly reflect some of the good of the Gospel. There is an element of optimism in both authors.

In unpacking both the distance and closeness between church and political reality Yoder and O'Donovan settle on a formula which Yoder calls 'duality without dualism'. In all their difference Yoder and O'Donovan are constantly busy on two fronts: On the one hand, the state can and must be somehow linked to and affected by the Christ narrative. On the other hand, it must never become an agent in the eschatological narrative. Yoder and O'Donovan simultaneously try to bring state and church together and keep them apart. This double-move creates considerable challenges and tensions in both authors.

In both authors the church is to address political rulers, what Yoder calls ‘the Christian witness to the state’. This can happen in a missionary or prophetic mode. Somehow the Lordship of Christ even over the world of politics must be communicated to the rulers.

The church is then not merely the sign of the new age but becomes the preacher of the eschaton as well, directly engaging the world of politics. The church does not just fill up in grateful submission the social space carved out by political authorities, but has an explicit task of monitoring and critiquing these authorities, be they pagan or Christian (cf. 3.1.3.3. and 2.2.4.2 a).

In our reading of Paul then, it will be important to see whether and how Paul connects the Christ narrative with political authority. It will be important to examine closely the rationales he gives for political authority, especially in Romans 13:1-7, and in what way this is qualified, detached from, or bracketed by the eschatological Christ narrative.

It will have to be tested whether the varying rationales of Yoder and O’Donovan for political authority are shared by Paul, or whether he knows of different ones.

In particular it has to be examined whether Paul would see political authority as conquered and possibly re-ordained by the Lordship of Christ. It is important to see whether Paul can picture the representatives of political authority as agents in God’s story of eschatological salvation, either as cooperating allies or as opponents.

Equally important is the question of whether Paul seeks in any way to generate a dialogue between church and political authority and what the function of such a dialogue would be.

It must be asked whether the state is pushed into a certain direction in Paul’s account of the Gospel, whether political rule is fully integrated into the all-embracing new reality of Christ, or whether it remains somewhat non-integrated.

With these questions we now turn to the second main part of this thesis, which offers a close reading of some key Pauline texts on Christ’s authority and on political authority: Philippians 2:5-11; Philippians 3 and Romans 13:1-7.

## 5. Philippians - Bowing before Christ

In this chapter I will offer a close reading of Philippians 2:5-11, famously known as Christ hymn, and Philippians 3, which picks up a lot of themes from the ‘hymn’. I will ask how Paul pictures Jesus Christ as Lord and in what ways he makes this portrait fruitful for the identity of the church, the place of rulers and the interaction of the church with rulers.

### 5.1 Introduction to Philippians

#### 5.1.1 Character

Philippians is a short and personal letter. It has been helpfully classified as “a hortatory or psychagogic letter of friendship.” The letter is written in a spirit of affectionate friendship<sup>2</sup> which is, however, embedded in a spiritual dimension: Paul and the Philippians are not just friends but also brothers (e.g., 1:12; 3:1; 4:1), fellow-workers (συνέρργοι, 4:3)<sup>3</sup>, indeed fellow-strugglers (συναθλοῦντες) and perhaps fellow-citizens (1:27; 3:20) in the same task. In all his affection Paul remains the founding father of his church: A lot of Philippians consists in friendly but firm admonition.<sup>4</sup>

#### 5.1.2 Occasion

A number of themes and motifs have been frequently identified as being important in the letter. Among them is the recurring motif of joy<sup>5</sup> but also motifs from the cultic,

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<sup>2</sup> Paul longs for the Philippians (1:8), they hold him in their hearts (1:7), he calls them ἀγαπητοί μου (2:12) or even stronger ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι (4:1).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the rich vocabulary of συν- and κοινων- words in 1:5; 1:7; 1:27; 2:1; 2:2; 2:17/18; 3:17; 4:3 which is used to emphasize the communion between Christ and Paul in 3:10.

<sup>4</sup> K. Stowers, ‘Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven’ in Bassler, J.M., ed., *Pauline Theology Volume I: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 105-121 (108). Gordon Fee similarly calls the letter both a “letter of friendship” and a “letter of moral exhortation” (G. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995). Loveday Alexander’s studies have shown close parallels between Philippians and family letters (L. Alexander, ‘Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians’ *JSNT* 37 (1989), 87-101).

<sup>5</sup> χαρά 1:4; 1:18 (2x); χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως (1:25; 2:2; 2:17 [2x]; 2:18 [2x]; 2:28; 2:29; 3:1) χαρὰ καὶ στέφανος (4:1; 4:4 [2x]); ἐχάρην (4.10).

political and possibly military arena<sup>6</sup>. The themes of unity and harmony, steadfastness, fearless proclamation and suffering have been identified as central aspects.<sup>7</sup>

James Ware sees Paul's central concern in admonishing the Philippians to help him further the work of the gospel through committed and fearless evangelism.<sup>8</sup> Paul Heil rightly broadens this notion by stating that the overall letter talks more about "the audience's own profound relationship with Christ, which is the basic and fundamental presupposition for their work of advancing the gospel of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Like other letters Philippians is written in lieu of Paul's physical presence.<sup>10</sup> Paul is through his imprisonment prevented from seeing the Philippians face to face. This situation is all the harder to bear because the separation might be definitive.<sup>11</sup> Paul's writing to the Philippians, however, seems to be motivated more by a broad pastoral concern than by a single issue or emergency: May the Philippians continue to grow in their faith without being intimidated by opposition, disheartened by suffering, corrupted by selfish behavior or led astray by false teachers.

### 5.1.3 Place and Time

Scholarly opinion is divided between the traditional assumption of Rome as the place where Paul wrote Philippians from and suggesting Ephesus or Caesarea as alternatives. In the former hypothesis Paul would have written the letter during the early 60s, whereas Ephesus and Caesarea would give the letter a slightly earlier date of composition. Ephesus is closer to Philippi and allows more easily for the various

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<sup>6</sup> For cultic motifs cf. Phil. 2:16-18 and Phil. 4:18, for military motifs cf. 1:27-30 and the interpretation of E.M. Krentz, 'Military Language and Metaphors in Philippians', in B.H. McLean, ed., *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honour of John C. Hurd* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 105-27.

Political motifs and metaphors can be found in 2:5-11 and 3:20-21, but also in 1:27.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Oakes sees "the themes of suffering and of unity" as "the most important themes" in the letter. (P. Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (SNTSMS 110; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 77, 175.

<sup>8</sup> J. P. Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (NovTSup 120; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> J. P. Heil, *Philippians: Let us Rejoice in Being Conformed to Christ* (Early Christianity and its Literature 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 8 n.14.

<sup>10</sup> Like other antique letters which were "...a substitute for actual presence and a medium for dealing with the problem of absence" (Stowers, 'Friends'), 109.

<sup>11</sup> Phil 1:23; 2:17.

journeys and communications described in Philippians. Paul's wish to visit the Philippians seems to contradict his earlier plans to travel westwards (Romans 15: 24) if he writes from Rome. Caesarea and Rome both have the advantage of tying in better with the specifically Roman signals in Philippians (1:13 mentions the *πραιτώριον*, 4:22 οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας). An imprisonment both in Caesarea and Rome is attested by Acts<sup>12</sup> whereas we have to infer it from the mentioning of various troubles for Ephesus (e.g. 2 Cor 1:8-11). The finality of Paul's expected verdict as mirrored in the letter goes well with the stage of Paul's trial where he at last appears before Caesar. There is no further appeal left. Upon balance I am inclined to side with the Rome hypothesis though the importance of place and date is secondary for the present inquiry.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.1.4 General socio-historical features of 1<sup>st</sup> century

#### Philippi

A lot of scholarly energy has been devoted towards reconstructing a plausible socio-historical context for the situation in Philippi.<sup>14</sup>

If Paul was in prison what was the case on the other side for the young Christian community in Philippi?<sup>15</sup>

Not least thanks to archeological excavations conducted in Philippi a broad consensus can be reached on various issues.<sup>16</sup> I shall list two important aspects that are potentially important for my reading of Philippians.

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 23:23-26:30; 28:16, 30. The Roman imprisonment is rather described as a house-arrest, though.

<sup>13</sup> For a good overview by one recent supporter of the Rome hypothesis cf. M. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1998), 25-32.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. C.S. de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (SBLDS 168; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), who operates with a sociological model of conflict. Also cf. Oakes, *People*, and Mikael Tellbe, 'The Sociological Factors Behind Philippians 3.1-11 and the Conflict at Philippi', *JSNT* 55 (1994), 97-121.

<sup>15</sup> For 'the side of the Philippians' cf. the very important contribution of Oakes, *People*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. for instance L. Bormann, *Philippi: Stadt und Christengemeinde zur Zeit des Paulus* (NovTSup 78; Leiden: Brill, 1995) and P. Pilhofer, *Philippi: Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas* (WUNT 87; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), Bakirtzis, C. and H. Koester, eds., *Philippi at the Time of Paul and after His Death* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998).

### a) The Roman colony

The distinctive character of the Roman colony Philippi has often been stressed.<sup>17</sup> De Vos emphasizes that "...complete Romanization would have been especially likely in a *colonia iuris Italici*."<sup>18</sup> Roman citizenship was highly prized and proudly owned by those who got it, though there is scholarly disagreement on how widespread it was.<sup>19</sup> There were certainly many veterans in the city and "the authorities in the city were extremely careful to follow Rome in all matters of life."<sup>20</sup> The city felt a special link to Rome, its mother town and was highly conscious of its status as a colony.<sup>21</sup> Many Latin inscriptions were found, though it is worth pointing out that "Greek was the predominant language of commerce and everyday life".<sup>22</sup> The self-conscious Roman character of the city is confirmed by the narrative in Acts 16.<sup>23</sup>

### b) A thriving religious scene

Archeological findings similarly testify to a varied and lively religious life with significant traces of the Imperial cult<sup>24</sup>, which was both exercised on its own and in combination with traditional cults.<sup>25</sup> This may well have been the case in Paul's time though precise dating is often difficult.<sup>26</sup> The Imperial cult, though widespread in the

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<sup>17</sup> On the colony cf. de Vos, *Community*, 111ff. Cf. also Acts 16:11.

<sup>18</sup> De Vos, *Community*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> In de Vos' opinion it was widely held: The "...deliberate contrast that Paul draws between Christ and the Emperor, and between the Roman Empire and the 'Kingdom of God' ...strongly suggests that the recipients of the letter are largely Roman citizens" (de Vos, *Community*, 251, similarly p.252: "...for the contrast to be meaningful in terms of competing for their allegiance, most needed to have been citizens.") It seems to me that the assessment of Roman citizenship is gained here through some problematic circular arguing. Oakes is more cautious. He concludes his discussion of the historical evidence by stating that "Citizenship was distributed extremely sparsely among Greeks in the East...and Philippi seems likely to have been a place where it was particularly sparse" (Oakes, *People*, 72).

<sup>20</sup> Tellbe, 'Factors', 108.

<sup>21</sup> On the rights and duties of a colony cf. e.g. A.T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 100.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 16: 11: *κολωνία* ; 16: 21 (stressing Romanness of citizens) and 16:37-39 (Paul's mentioning of his Roman citizenship and the fearful response of the *ῥαβδούχοι* provoked by it).

<sup>24</sup> "Probably the most important cult, on the evidence of inscriptions and coins, was the Imperial cult" (de Vos, *Community*, 234). For a good overview of findings concerning the cult cf. Tellbe, 'Factors', 109, n. 49 and de Vos, *Community*, 249.

<sup>25</sup> In de Vos' view other cults in Philippi "may well have been linked to the Imperial cult" (de Vos, *Community*, 250).

<sup>26</sup> According to de Vos "...most of the material...comes from the second century CE or later, and the date of many of the inscriptions is uncertain" (De Vos, *Community*, 234).

East, was often initiated by the subjects themselves rather than being imposed by Rome.<sup>27</sup> ‘Roman’ places like Philippi were furthermore likely to follow the Roman model, which was far more restrained in that it did not sacrifice to the living emperor.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning Judaism no traces of synagogues or other signs of a significant Jewish presence have been found in Philippi for the time in question.<sup>29</sup> The latter fact is one of several difficulties that stand in the way of Tellbe’s proposal that the Christian converts in Philippi sought circumcision in order to enjoy the privileges of a *religio licita* by joining the synagogue.<sup>30</sup> Could such a newly sprung up group of ex-Gentile Jewish converts have credibly claimed ancestral traditions in a place where polytheistic worship was strong and traditional anti-Jewish sentiments likely widespread?<sup>31</sup>

### c)      **Reconstructing the conflict**

Some reconstructions are more concerned with the specific events and groups that are mirrored in the text than with the overall historical background. While a lot of research has engaged in identifying the ‘opponents’ from within the Christian movement, whom Paul polemically refers to in chapter 3, the hostility from outside has provoked a good deal of scholarly interest in recent years. A few contributors try to read both problems together, assuming that Paul was on trial for propagating Christ in an anti-Imperial fashion. According to such readings, the various enemies and opponents alluded to are all trying in some way or other to soften the conflict with Rome and to lure the Philippian Christians away from faithful suffering and towards the embracing of Roman status, thinking and gestures of loyalty towards the

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (Vol.1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 349.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Beard-North-Price, *Religions*, 349 (for the official Roman cult) and 353 (Distinctive form of worship expected from Roman citizens). Among the anti-imperial exegetes Heen is remarkable for noting that ‘Romanness’ and ‘divine honors for a living emperor’ actually do *not* go well together (E. M. Heen, ‘Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule: *Isa theos* and the Cult of the Emperor in the East’ in: Horsley, *Roman Imperial Order*, 125-155 (136).

<sup>29</sup> Tellbe, ‘Factors’, 104. Luke’s account mentions only a προσευχή by the river (Acts 16:13), not a synagogue.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Tellbe, ‘Factors’, 117.

<sup>31</sup> Ascough adds to this concern the critical question whether “the authorities would not actually see through such a ruse” (R.S. Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT 161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 149, n.180.



emperor. Paul very fittingly combated this danger by painting Christ as the great counter-emperor in Philippians 2:5-11 and by using striking political imagery and vocabulary at the end of chapter 3 but also in 1: 27.<sup>32</sup> At this stage I merely try to assess the historical plausibility of the underlying scenarios, without yet deciding on the inherent plausibility of these readings.

#### d) Opposition from outside

Paul clearly talks about opposition<sup>33</sup>, especially in 1:28-30 where he mentions opposition or resistance and calls suffering for Christ a gracious gift (ἐχαρίσθη... ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν). As far as Paul is concerned it is safe to assume that he was in a Roman prison, where he had to fear for the worst (1:20ff.).<sup>34</sup> The charge against him must have been serious. In combination with the wide-spread Imperial cult it is tempting to think that Paul was being tried for high treason by virtue of his confession of Christ the Lord.<sup>35</sup> But would the Roman authorities have been bothered by such a confession, unless it led to tangible gestures of contempt and political resistance or defiance? Are there other possibilities as to why Imperial Rome would have treated Paul this way? We have unfortunately not much evidence how the tiny nascent Christian movement was viewed by Roman officials for the time in

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<sup>32</sup> Perkins states that “the hymnic section in Phil 2:6-11 also undercuts claims that any earthly powers might make for honors or allegiance...” (P. Perkins, ‘Theology for the Heavenly Politeuma’, in Bassler, *Pauline Theology*, 89-104 (94). Wright claims that “Jesus was Lord-kyrios, with all its Septuagintal overtones – and Caesar was not” (Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 182). Similarly Bockmuehl: “For the Philippian Christians, their supreme political and religious loyalties had been transferred from Rome to their ‘heavenly commonwealth’” (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 37).

<sup>33</sup> We find the following direct vocabulary of suffering in Philippians: πάσχειν παθημάτα (1:29; 3:10) θλιψις (1:17; 4:14). In addition there is vocabulary about death: θάνατος/ἀποθανεῖν/ἀναλῦσαι (1:20, 21, 23; 2:8 (2x) 2:27; 2:30; 3:10), about grief λύπη / ἄλυπότερος (1:27, 28) and illness ἡσθένησεν (2:26, 27). Sometimes sacrificial metaphors are used to denote dying and hardship: σπένδομαι / θυσία (2:17; 4:18). Expressions of lowliness and emptying such as ἐκένωσεν (2:7) ἑταπείνωσεν / ταπείνωσις/ ταπεινοῦσθαι (2:8; 3:21; 4:12) can have connotations of suffering, too, though this is not the only and most defining strand of meaning. Paul’s sufferings are alluded to by δέσμοι (1:7, 13, 14, 17). The following expressions could be indicators of opposition: τῶν ἀντικειμένων (1:28) ἀπολογία/βεβαιώσις (1:7, 16) τολμᾶν ἀφοβῶς (1:14) συναθλέω (1:27; 4:3) μὴ πυρρόμενοι (1:28) ἀγῶν (1:30) Persecution is never mentioned, except when Paul talks about his past: διώκω (3:6; in 3:12, 14 the same word is used figuratively).

<sup>34</sup> Bloomquist’s description of Roman prisons reminds us that these were indeed places of suffering. However, Bloomquist’s dark description of Roman prisons as hellish places of unremitting torture that inevitably lead to death does not square well with Paul’s genuine hope for release (2:24). (G. L. Bloomquist, ‘Subverted by Joy: Suffering and Joy in Paul’s letter to the Philippians’ *Int* 61(2007), 270-282 (274).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Tellbe who states that “...the apostolic preaching is depicted as incompatible with loyalty to the Roman empire” (Tellbe, ‘Factors’, 108). Also cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 31.

question.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that in a pagan environment it attracted some of the traditional anti-Jewish sentiments<sup>37</sup> while the hostility the Christian preaching generated in some Jewish quarters made the Christian missionaries look like dangerous trouble makers.<sup>38</sup> If the narratives in Acts are anything to go by, both aspects came into play from time to time.<sup>39</sup> Paul was seen as stirring up controversy with members of the Jewish or pagan communities and therefore endangering the public peace. Accusations could take a distinctively political twist.<sup>40</sup> But equally it could be the delicate combination of religion and business, not religion and politics that gave rise to commotions as Acts 16:18 and Acts 19 testify. For some of these reasons or a combination of them Paul was put in Roman custody and awaited a final verdict.<sup>41</sup>

The sufferings of the Philippian believers are harder to pin down.<sup>42</sup> Paul depicts them as τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες (1:30). Most of them are probably not in prison but in a position to provide support for Paul (4:10-11).<sup>43</sup> Peter Oakes develops a credible scenario of hostility that arose from the new Christians' refusal to worship

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<sup>36</sup> One of the earliest documents are Tacitus' Annals with his report of the Neronian persecution and his comment that Christians were despised for their *odium humani generis* (Tacitus, Annals XV.44).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. P.T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 5.

<sup>38</sup> "[T]he immense weight that Roman society placed on law and order" put people in danger who were perceived as troublemakers (Oakes, *People*, 101).

<sup>39</sup> The Christian missionaries are denounced as "Jews, advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe" (Acts 16: 20, 21). This may capture quite well the pagan outrage at this new Jewish sect that was not content to keep its strange customs to itself but aggressively promoted them for all people: "In the eyes of the polytheists themselves, then, Christians were not just atheists but proselytizers for atheism" (M. Goodman, *The Roman World: 44BC-AD180* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 326. This pagan outrage may in turn account for the hostility of some Diaspora Jews against Paul, who possibly feared that angered reaction of pagans against Paul the Jew, who converted pagans to Judaism, might hit them, too (M. Goodman, 'The Persecution of Paul by Diaspora Jews' in idem, *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 145-152 (150).

<sup>40</sup> The missionaries are said to promote βασιλέα ἔτερον and act contrary to the δόγματα Καίσαρος (Acts 17:7).

<sup>41</sup> Fox sketches out how the initially Jewish accusations against Paul may have led to his appeal to Caesar and how Paul's trial may well have accumulated in Paul's refusal to swear by the emperor and led to Paul's execution (R.L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 430-432.

<sup>42</sup> Pace Vincent, who writes: "They [the Philippians] too have suffered persecutions, and for the same reason, and from the same adversaries" (M.R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902], 36). Tellbe is broader, talking about the opponents as being "most likely the Roman authorities or pagan society" (Tellbe, 'Factors', 107).

<sup>43</sup> De Vos acknowledges this but states that it "...does not rule out a significant involvement of the magistrates" (de Vos, *Community*, 265).

the gods of house and city.<sup>44</sup> Transgressing the boundaries of time-honoured religious customs was probably enough to attract considerable hostility. The paucity of evidence calls for caution. A range of hostile reactions, from shunning to bullying by neighbours, to sporadic interference by the authorities is thinkable. This was probably provoked by a number of gestures that caused anger, the foremost being the refusal to worship the gods, including the emperor. However, we must not allow later scenarios of a regional or empire-wide state-led persecution centered on the Imperial cult and the related martyr literature to slip into our reconstruction of the situation in Philippi too quickly.<sup>45</sup> They are simply anachronistic for the time in question.<sup>46</sup> It is furthermore important to see that suffering for the sake of the Gospel is broader in Philippians than suffering hostility from other people: Epaphroditus is praised as somebody who “approached death for the sake of the work of Christ” (2:30). From the context it is most natural to assume that he fell ill on a missionary trip. Suffering in the service of Christ can have many faces, as Paul’s lists of hardship show elsewhere (2 Cor 11:24ff.).<sup>47</sup>

I assume therefore that the conversion of the Philippian church members first led to emotional and economic suffering at the hands of *former friends and family members* and only secondarily and sporadically to the involvement of the local magistrate.

#### e)      **Opposition and Danger from Inside**

The enemies and opponents from within are even harder to identify than the precise hostility from outside. Even the boundaries between both categories are sometimes disputed. I take it that the people who are not supportive of Paul and preach from wrong motives (1:15-18) are not the opponents mentioned in 1:28-30.<sup>48</sup> The latter

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<sup>44</sup> Oakes, *People*, 99ff. Also cf. de Vos’ comments on the *pax deorum*, de Vos, *Community*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Contra* S.E. Fowl, *Philippians* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 64, n.15.

<sup>46</sup> According to Beard-North-Price apart from the Neronian outburst in the mid- 60s, executions of Christians started from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century on. They see the Decian persecution (249/50) as the first systematic anti-Christian campaign centered around sacrifices for the gods (Beard-North-Price, *Religions*, 239). Similarly de Ste Croix: “We know of no persecution by the Roman government until 64, and there was no general persecution until that of Decius” (G.E.M. de Ste Croix, ‘Why were the early Christians persecuted?’ in idem, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105-152 (106).

<sup>47</sup> Ascough rightly states that in the context of 4:14 “... ὁλιψις is clearly his [Paul’s] impoverishment” (Ascough, *Associations*, 118.)

<sup>48</sup> *Contra* Ascough, *Associations*, 145.

look very much like the pagan neighbours who made life hard for the Christian converts as described in the previous paragraph. Nor are the opponents in 1:15-18 - in whose preaching Paul rejoices despite all the tension that shines through- to be equated to the opponents in 3:2, whom Paul calls ‘dogs’. This last group mentioned in 3:2 and various allusions to wrong patterns of behaviour in the subsequent chapter have generated the greatest interest and an immense flood of scholarly literature.<sup>49</sup> For the moment it suffices to state that it is best to see the opponents of 3: 2-11 as fellow Christians, who propagate circumcision as a condition for full membership in the covenant people. These missionaries, often labelled ‘Judaizers’ in the literature, seem to belong to a similar strand of early Christianity that troubled Paul in Galatia, as a number of ‘Galatian’ words or phrases in that section suggest.<sup>50</sup> There is no good reason to conjure up a different identity for them. From Paul’s way of speaking - a stern warning but so far no concrete rebuke for the Philippians - makes it plausible to think of these missionaries as a threat but not yet as a presence in Philippi. Whether Paul is also fighting proto-Gnostic ideas, an overrealized eschatology and a false perfectionism has to be considered further below (5.3.4). If he does, it is not at all certain that all these features held true for the Judaizers initially addressed. Various attempts to subsume all the wrong patterns either under the label ‘Judaizers’<sup>51</sup> or to come up with exotic combinations of heresies look somewhat forced.<sup>52</sup>

The suggestion that all these warnings are ultimately directed against pride in Greco-Roman status symbols will be discussed later. For the moment it is enough to state that we are on reasonably safe terrain in assuming that Paul is worried about the potential advent of Judaizing missionaries in Philippi at the beginning of chapter 3. How the remaining concerns of chapter 3 can be linked with that worry remains to be seen.

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<sup>49</sup> For a good survey of the discussion cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 26-35. Also cf. K. Grayston, ‘The Opponents in Philippians 3’, *ExpTim* 97 (1986), 170-172.

<sup>50</sup> ἡ περιτομή; the contrast between σὰρξ and πνεῦμα the phrases circling around δικαιοσύνη νόμος πίστις.

<sup>51</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> For the latter cf. Koester’s Jewish Gnostic perfectionists (H. Koester, ‘The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment’ *NTS* 8 (1961-62), 317-332) and W. Schmithals’ Jewish Gnostic libertine pneumatics (W. Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics* (tr. John E. Steeley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 65-122.

### 5.1.5 Authenticity and Integrity

While authenticity is largely uncontested for Philippians, the integrity of the letter has been seen as more problematic.<sup>53</sup> The abrupt change in 3:2 after what could be taken as a concluding phrase (τὸ λοῖπον), the late expression of thanks for the Philippians' gift in chp. 4 and the seemingly very different character of chp. 3 have led many scholars to come forward with hypotheses of multiple letters, which were put together by a redactor.<sup>54</sup> However, these proposals failed to account for the persisting ruptures and therefore clumsiness of the redactor. There are no hints of complicated redactional processes in the textual history and scholars have widely disagreed in respect of the boundaries of each letter or letter fragment.<sup>55</sup> Recently proposals have tried to uncover an artful rhetorical structure in Philippians:<sup>56</sup> "Many elements of NT texts that were once seen as indicating redactional seams are now seen as features of rhetorical, epistolary or narrative technique."<sup>57</sup> Though some of these attempts probably read an all too tight rhetorical structure into Philippians<sup>58</sup> the various parts are clearly inter-connected and held together by recurring motifs and themes.<sup>59</sup> The exhortation aspect of Philippians probably accounts for the more artful rhetoric whereas the friendship aspect can easily account for a number of loosely structured themes, held together by the desire to renew and deepen the Philippians' and Paul's fellowship in Christ.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For a survey cf. Perkins, 'Theology', 89-90 ('The Integrity of Philippians').

<sup>54</sup> For an overview cf. D.E. Garland, 'The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors' *NovT* 27 (1985), 141-175.

<sup>55</sup> "...the great variety in such reconstructions of the fragments and of the places where they are to be joined, the existence of quite satisfactory explanations of the structure of the letter as we now have it, and the repetition of certain themes throughout it cast doubt on the necessity for a fragment hypothesis" (Lincoln, *Paradise*, 87).

<sup>56</sup> E.g. D.F. Watson, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question', *NovT* 30 (1988) 57-88. Cf. also the first part of L.G. Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, (JSNTSup 78; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>57</sup> Oakes, *People*, 78.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Fee's critical comments in Fee, *Philippians*, 14-16.

<sup>59</sup> "Despite the abrupt transitions, the entire letter as it now stands, is the product of the author's intention set forth in the epistolary thanksgiving" (Jewett, 'The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians' in *NovT* 12 (1970), 40-53 (53).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Fowl, *Philippians*, 8.

## 5.2 The Rulers and the Lord: Philippians 2:5-11

In this section I am going to look closely at Philippians 2:5-11, where Christ is portrayed as Lord of all. I will ask what this passage suggests about the character and scope of Christ's rule. Is Christ portrayed like other rulers, perhaps as a Davidic king, and thus seen as fulfilling God's design of authority as O'Donovan suggests? Or do we sense clear overtones of an exclusiveness that pushes back the claims of earthly rulers as O'Donovan equally proposes in different strands of his work? Is anything made of the at present hidden character of Christ's rule? Does Christ's Lordship aim at engaging and submitting other rulers as in O'Donovan's narrative?

Is Christ's Lordship contrasted with all earthly rulers to the point of subverting their claims and common notions of rule as such, as in Yoder's narrative? Does Christ's rule establish a new community and what character would the latter have?

The discussion of this text and of Paul's own use in the wider letter will show that Paul does indeed use it in a distinctively political way.

But first a few comments are in order on this much debated text.

### 5.2.1 Some General Remarks on the Poem

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the most important Christological texts in the New Testament, which has generated a host of scholarly contributions.<sup>61</sup> Its solemn style and rare vocabulary let these few verses stand out clearly from their context.<sup>62</sup> While the piece was traditionally seen as a proof-text of orthodox Christology assigned to Paul, modern scholars undertook many energetic attempts to trace the religious and

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<sup>61</sup> In his comprehensive survey and evaluation of research on the poem Ralph Martin worked through approximately 500 titles as early as 1967 (R.P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, and Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1983).

<sup>62</sup> Among countless attempts to arrange the poem in verses I follow Morna Hooker, who suggests a structure of four chiastic verses (6 lines- 4 lines-4 lines-6 lines): Each 'verse' consists of two halves and each half except v.8b begins with an introductory participle: ὅς; ἀλλά; καί; διό; ἵνα; καί (M. D. Hooker, 'Philippians 2:6-11' in E.E. Ellis and E. Grässer, eds., *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 151-164 (158).

literary pre-history of the passage, often disputing its Pauline authorship.<sup>63</sup> The various suggestions for a *Vorlage* and subsequent Pauline glosses<sup>64</sup> have brought no consensus and most of the proposals of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and beyond have been dropped again.<sup>65</sup> The solemn and exalted style of the passage led to the near universal practice of calling it a hymn. While it may well be that these few lines open a window to early Christian worship and that these verses were sung,<sup>66</sup> this is not certain and it is therefore better to call this passage a ‘poem’.<sup>67</sup> In recent decades the interest shifted back from diachronic to synchronic readings. After reading the poem in deliberate isolation from its epistolary context<sup>68</sup> it was pointed out more recently that the poem is carefully linked with its immediate and wider context.<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein the ethical function of the poem was re-assessed once again.<sup>70</sup> There have been various careful proposals about the ethical use and impetus of the poem on the wider letter but also important caveats that the poem is much richer than the sum total of its ethical applications.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The groundbreaking work is E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil.2:5-11* (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 18.4; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1928). For a much later example focussed on the religious-historical background cf. J.T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 58-74.

<sup>64</sup> The most famous and widely held assumption is that θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ (8b) is a Pauline gloss. Over against this view Otfried Hofius offers a convincing explanation for V. 8b as an *anadiplosis*, which is a common phenomenon in Psalms and other hymnic texts (Cf. O. Hofius, *Der Christushymnus Philipper 2,6-11* [WUNT 17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976], 8ff).

<sup>65</sup> Fee gives an overview of the vastly different proposals together with some biting criticism (Fee, *Philippians*, 43-44).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. for example Gamber, who thinks that verse 9 served as a chorus verse (Gamber, K., ‘Der Christus-Hymnus im Philipperbrief in liturgiegeschichtlicher Sicht’, *Bib* 51 [1970], 369-376).

<sup>67</sup> Rightly cautious is S.E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 44, though he continues to use the term ‘hymn’.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. J. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Christological Anthropology in Phil.II, 6-11’, *RB* 83 (1976), 25-50 (26).

<sup>69</sup> See further below 5.2.5.1 and 5.3.1.

<sup>70</sup> After the reserved and at times polemical stand against imitation Christology in Ernst Käsemann’s seminal work (E. Käsemann, ‘Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2,5-11’, in idem., *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967] 51-95) proposals such as Fowl, *Story*, and L.W. Hurtado, ‘Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5-11’, in P. Richardson, and J.C. Hurd, eds., *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 113-126 showed that an ethical reading of the poem is not confined to the language of ‘imitation’.

<sup>71</sup> “[t]he hymn was much more than a bland suggestion that because Jesus had been humble his followers must become humble...the song articulated...a rich cargo of non-verbal affections and emotions...Interpreters must seek to do justice to multiple motifs, confessional, historical, moral, liturgical, existential” (P.S. Minear, ‘Singing and Suffering in Philippi’ in R.T. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa, eds., *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 202-219 (205).

Concerning authorship among others Morna Hooker rightly pointed out that “...even if the material is non-Pauline, we may expect Paul himself to have interpreted it and used it in a Pauline manner.”<sup>72</sup>

### 5.2.2 Christ’s Authority: Ultimate – Universal- Supreme

The poem tells about the way of Christ from some elevated state to humiliation and death and from death to even greater exaltation. There is wide agreement that the poem is roughly divided into two parts, the first one (vv. 6-8) recounting Christ’s descent and the second one (vv. 9-11) his ascent. We get the impression of a coherent story about the same person though the name ‘Jesus’ is mentioned as late as v.9 for the first time.<sup>73</sup> Still the two parts are not strictly mirror-inverted. The step by step descent (οὐχ ἡγήσατο, ἐκένωσεν, μορφὴν δούλου, ὁμοιώματι...γενόμενος, σχήματι ἐυρεθείς, ἐταπείνωσεν, γενόμενος ὑπήκοος) is matched by only two divine actions of ὑπερύψωσεν and ἐχαρίσατο.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly there is practically no shared vocabulary between v. 6-8 and vv 9-11, θεός being the one exception (2:6, 9, 11). It has been noted that whereas Christ is the sole actor and thinker in vv. 6-8, God becomes the subject from verse 9 on.<sup>75</sup> God and Christ are the two main figures then, who act and (in Christ’s case) are acted upon. There is close relatedness though little interaction between God and Christ.<sup>76</sup> The poem expresses and explores this relatedness, though not in a static, essentialist way but through recounting the story of Christ. In addition to these two actors there is a strangely collective and comprehensive ‘subject’ in v.10 and 11, described as πᾶν γόνυ and πᾶσα γλῶσσα. In the confession and reverent homage given by this collective ‘third party’ culminates God’s goal for creation (v.10b). The homage rendered to Christ glorifies God. Christ’s exalted status which

<sup>72</sup> Hooker, ‘Philippians’, 152.

<sup>73</sup> Pace Käsemann who claims that the contrast is stressed in the text, not the continuity of the person. (Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 72).

<sup>74</sup> Even if some lines in 6-8 are seen as parallelisms there is more vocabulary to describe the descent than the ascent.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Oakes, *People*, 201; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 125; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 232, F.W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A&C Black, 1959), 85.

<sup>76</sup> Whether the poem expresses proto-orthodox statements such as ideas of Christ’s pre-existence is disputed. Cf. the proposals of Dunn and Murphy-O’Connor who equal the expression ‘form of God’ with ‘image of God’ and see in Christ an antitype to Adam (Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, ‘The last Adam’ in idem, *Christology in the Making*, (London: SCM, 1980), 98-128 and J. Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Anthropology’).



appears in close parallel with God (v.9b, 11b)<sup>77</sup> seems to broaden a mere *per aspera ad astra* scheme of a divine hero.

The poem is Christological rather than soteriological.<sup>78</sup> It cumulates in the acclamation that ‘Jesus Christ [is] Lord’ to the glory of God the father’ (v.11). This certainly hails Jesus as the ultimate Lord.

#### a) The ultimate Lord

Christ’s Lordship in one sense is an established fact that has already happened, as the aorist of ὑπερύψωσεν (v.9) makes clear. This corresponds to early Christian thinking which not only confesses that Christ has been raised from the dead but exalted to God’s right hand.<sup>79</sup> The ἵνα is followed by two aorists in the conjunctive in v. 10 and 11. Some textual witnesses render ἐξομολογήσεται instead of ἐξομολογήσεται and thus follow the future tense of the LXX text, which is alluded to. According to Käsemann a future aspect is impossible “...da der Hymnus ja von einem Geschehen bei der Inthronisation Christi spricht, die als solche erfolgt ist.”<sup>80</sup> Käsemann assumes that the majority of textual witnesses deliberately dropped the LXX future tense to avoid the danger of connecting the universal homage with the parousia.<sup>81</sup> Things might be much less complicated to account for, given the fact that the ἵνα simply asks for an aorist. This does not exclude future connotations at all.<sup>82</sup> The acclamation does not have to be pictured as a once and for all event, as Hofius shows well, though

<sup>77</sup> I can detect no “note of subordination”, *contra* L.J. Kreitzer, ‘When He at Last Is First!’ in R.P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 111-127 (121).

<sup>78</sup> Various scholars seem uneasy with this: Hofius makes a lot of ‘the cross’ as carrying the normal Pauline connotation of *pro nobis*: “Es drängt sich...die Vermutung auf, dass im Hymnus eine feste Anschauung von der Heilsbedeutung des Sterbens Jesu bereits vorausgesetzt ist” (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 17). Käsemann affirms its soteriological character insofar as it talks about the breaking of *ananke* (Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 81). Dunn and Wright read Adam-Christology between the lines without and with pre-existence (cf. Dunn, *Christology*, esp. 117 ff. and N.T. Wright, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord: Philippians 2.5-11’ in idem, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 1991), 56-98 (see esp. 58-62).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Hebrews 1:3; Acts 2:33, 34; cf. also Matthew 22:44 and 1 Cor 15:25 where a similar idea shines through.

<sup>80</sup> Käsemann acknowledges that this event is not to be seen as finished; however, the acclamation happens now and that is precisely why it cannot speak of human beings (Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 86-87).

<sup>81</sup> Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 86.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 27.

the exaltation clearly is, but can be seen as an ongoing and dynamic process.<sup>83</sup> The initial acclamation can be repeated by the subjects and also broadened as more and more subjects bow down to offer it. The picture in v.10 and 11 is clearly not yet a universally experienced reality. But it is where everything heads and culminates. The Christians who recite or sing the poem know about this future of the world. They look forward to it but also anticipate it by confessing Christ as Lord themselves (Romans 10:9; Philippians 1:2). If Ware is right with his thesis that Philippians is primarily about mission the present can be seen as the time where a growing number of people anticipates Christ's future homage.<sup>84</sup>

### **b) The universal Lord**

The acclamation about Christ's ultimate authority in the future corresponds to the believers' confession in the present, though this is not made explicit in the poem. This could lead to the conclusion that at present Christ's authority is hidden and by definition only relevant for those who can perceive and acknowledge it in faith. Bousset famously proposed that Christ is only confessed as Lord over his church.<sup>85</sup> Over against this Käsemann rightly emphasizes "dass Jesus hier als Herr der Welt und nicht der Gemeinde proklamiert [wird]."<sup>86</sup>

The exaltation of Christ does not just aim towards Christ's final Lordship but equally confesses that this ultimate Lordship will be acknowledged in the most comprehensive and universal way as the expression ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων (v.10) suggests. The most natural reading seems to be to see the phrase as a comprehensive statement, operating with geographical-mythical terminology perhaps within the idea of an antique three-level-universe.<sup>87</sup> I suggest to translate the

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<sup>83</sup> Hofius concludes from OT examples that there often is a 'Inthronisationsruf' which belongs with the enthronement scene and an ongoing and possibly widening 'Huldigungsruf': "Hier sind Inthronisation und universale Huldigung deutlich als zeitlich voneinander getrennte Akte gedacht" (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 34).

<sup>84</sup> "In Paul's thought, the eschatological and salvific reign of God over the nations depicted in Isaiah 45 has already begun through the conversion of the gentiles to the gospel of Christ" (Ware, *Mission*, 230).

<sup>85</sup> Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921), 89.

<sup>86</sup> Käsemann, 'Analyse', 85.

<sup>87</sup> Rev. 5:13 uses similar expressions, adding the sea; Psalm 148 has a number of creatures in heaven and on earth bursting forth into the praise of God. Bockmuehl calls the expression a "conventional description of the universe, following contemporary Jewish and Christian cosmology" (Bockmuehl,

phrase with ‘all there is’. Again it seems to be a phrase which does not wish to be precise but aims at the greatest possible comprehensiveness. It seems to me that the bowed knee and the confessing tongue give preference to human actors, especially in the context of the Isaiah quotation<sup>88</sup> but this does not exclude that both angelic and demonic or spiritual powers are included in the expression without specifically being targeted.<sup>89</sup>

### c) The supreme Lord

Christ’s Lordship is not just final and universal in its temporal and spatial scope but also portrayed as supreme. The title κύριος (v.11) can of course simply denote somebody who enjoys a higher status in antiquity: A master as opposed to a slave<sup>90</sup>, an owner, an employer, a husband. Κύριε/ κυρία can be used as a respectful title for a man or a woman of higher status.<sup>91</sup> The term basically describes somebody who enjoys power over himself or others: “Κύριος, originally the one who is fully authorised and has the legal power of disposal, did not contain the element of arbitrariness which so easily clung to δεσπότης.”<sup>92</sup> A number of gods in the Hellenistic world were venerated as κύριοι as well, though Foerster points out that “κύριος never became widespread as a predicate of the gods”<sup>93</sup> in that period.

The title as such expresses thus always authority or higher status though not necessarily supreme, let alone exclusive authority. However, in the context of the poem it is clear that Jesus is confessed as the supreme Lord. The short acclamation in

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*Philippians*, 145). Fee suggests that the ἐπουρανίων refers to heavenly and spiritual beings, whereas the ἐπιγείων refers to people living on earth and καταχθονίων to the dead (Fee, *Philippians*, 224-225). Fowl rightly emphasizes that “the clause asserts the universal scope of the homage paid to Jesus” (Fowl, *Philippians*, 103), which matters more than identifying its individual parts.

<sup>88</sup> Ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ (Is. 45:23b).

<sup>89</sup> Käsemann’s suggestion that it talks about spiritual powers, which hold the cosmos in bondage (Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 85ff.) has been criticized by Hofius, who vehemently denies that the terms refer to evil powers: “Aus dem Umstand, dass die Erhöhung Christi als Inthronisation zum Herrn der Welt verstanden ist, kann nicht gefolgert werden, dass die Verse 10f von der Proskynese und Akklamation der widergöttlichen Mächte handeln” (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 33).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Matth. 10:24: Α δούλος is not above his κύριος.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Matth 27:63 (the Pharisees addressing Pilate); John 12:21 (Some Greeks, addressing Philip) or Acts 16:30 (The gaoler addressing Paul and Silas with κύριοι).

<sup>92</sup> W. Foerster, Art. Κύριος in G. Kittel, ed., G.W. Bramley, tr. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. III, Θ-K; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 1039-1095 (1046).

<sup>93</sup> Foerster, κύριος, 1051.

v.11, κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός credits the name of Jesus with two honorific titles. It could probably be read just as well as ‘The Lord Jesus is the Christ/Messiah’.<sup>94</sup> The structure of the sentence talks about Jesus’ Lordship in an emphatic way. The κύριος title is not used as one attribute of Jesus Christ (‘Jesus is some kind of Lord’) but the formula rather expresses that the title of Lord belongs to Jesus (Christ).

Furthermore, Jesus is granted the ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνόματα (v.9). The quote from Isaiah 45:23 in Phil 2: 10-11 suggests that it is God’s own ineffable name, YHWH, substituted with κύριος in the LXX that is granted to Jesus.<sup>95</sup> It is hardly possible to think of a higher title and status.

While it is an understandable and tempting move, ‘supreme’ must not be automatically read as ‘exclusive’. While the supreme head of a pyramid can presumably only be one person at a time, there is room for derived authority and power underneath. Power and authority are not a zero sum game.<sup>96</sup> It is hard to imagine that various rulers should see themselves instantly threatened by the proclamation of a supreme deity. Instead, various rulers felt probably commissioned, upheld by and indebted to a superior spiritual authority.<sup>97</sup> It is possible to imagine that the early Christians saw other rulers as integrated in Christ’s power pyramid, maybe even without the former’s knowledge.<sup>98</sup> It is also possible to picture them as trying to invite existing rulers to consciously take their place within this pyramid.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Acts 2:36: “...καὶ κύριον αὐτὸν καὶ χριστὸν ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός”.

<sup>95</sup> For a discussion on the origin of the practice to render the tetragramm as κύριος cf. Lacey, D.R., ‘“One Lord” in Pauline Christology’ in H.H. Rowdon, ed., *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 191-203. Lacey points out that within this practice κύριος becomes more of a name than a title: “It is noteworthy that the form is commonly the anarthrous *kyrios*, ‘Lord’; not the definite *ho kyrios*, ‘the Lord’; though “there is a strong element of caprice in the tradition” (ibid., 194).

<sup>96</sup> Lendon’s study on Roman honour gives a fascinating insight into the web of honour that relied on constant exchange and passing on, and of which the emperor was part (J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997]). This may well *mutatis mutandis* be applied to the issues of power and authority: They have to flow and need to be exchanged and to a degree shared with others in order to remain meaningful.

<sup>97</sup> This would certainly be unproblematic from the emperor’s perspective who “was part of a larger divine matrix—a prominent part but in no way isolatable from the divine machinery by which the world was rightly governed” (J.M.G. Barclay, ‘Paul, Roman Religion and the Emperor’ in idem, *Pauline Churches*, 345- 362 (354). On the varying roles of the emperors themselves as “pious worshippers, as recipients of favours from the gods...or as themselves installed among (or as) universal divine powers” cf. ibid., 354.

<sup>98</sup> “Die Christen gehorchen den irdischen Herren, z.B. der römischen Obrigkeit, weil sie wissen, dass Christus bereits deren Herr ist” (L. Goppelt, ‘Die Herrschaft Christi und die Welt’ in idem,

In short: The undeniable fact that Christ is portrayed as the final, universal and supreme Lord does not in itself with necessity lead to a polemical attack on or replacement of all earthly authority or any specific exponent of it. In order to assess whether and how supreme authority gains an exclusive edge or is even polemically slanted we have to do some more careful observations of the text. To this problem we now turn.

### **5.2.3 The Rulers of this World: Tentative Analogy or Dark Foil?**

#### **5.2.3.1 I am God and No-one Else – Exclusive Monotheism and the Imperial Cult**

##### **a) The exclusive Lord**

One possible trajectory from supreme authority to exclusiveness is certainly the Old Testament background of Philippians 2:10-11, which quotes, as we have seen, from Isaiah 45. The context of the quote is a passionately monotheistic text with a highly exclusive slant and at the same time a broad universal perspective. There is the well-known polemic against the powerless idols and their makers – they will be ashamed. (Isaiah 45:16). The God of Israel presents himself as Lord, creator and saviour (Is. 45:18; 45:21) calling the nations to repentance and salvation (45:22). The basis for this call is the exclusiveness of God: “I am God and no-one else.” (v. 22) The passage culminates in what is quoted in Phil 2:9: “To me every knee shall bow and every tongue will swear” (Is. 45:23). Our interest here is not in the astonishing sharing of Jesus in the divine attributes and glory. We rather wonder what consequences this passionate and exclusive monotheism might have had for the readers of both Isaiah 45 and Philippians 2.

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*Christologie und Ethik: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 102-136 (122). We will turn to this influential view again in the chapter on Romans 12 and 13.

<sup>99</sup> The latter would be O'Donovan's reading of the Constantinian turn.

Early Christians no doubt fully adopted the Jewish commitment to religious exclusivity, namely monotheism, despite their central devotion for Jesus.<sup>100</sup> It is unthinkable to worship a plurality of gods. Paul's own comprehensive statement in this matter is 1 Cor 8:6: ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.

These words, spoken in the context of the famous debate about the eating of meat sacrificed to idols leave open whether the εἷς κύριος forbids loyalty to other κύριοι in the same way the εἷς θεός forbids worship of other θεοί.<sup>101</sup> Strictly speaking a monotheist cannot say that there are 'many gods'. Accordingly Paul makes sure to qualify his statement earlier on, calling the gods λεγόμενοι θεοί and εἰδωλα (1 Cor 8:4-5). Would Paul call the Roman officials, the distinguished members in the church, the governors, emperors and generals of this world λεγόμενοι κύριοι, perhaps under his breath, perhaps openly so? The passage does not answer this question.

We then have clear echoes of religious exclusiveness in the poem as elsewhere in the New Testament. God is one, and demands full and undivided loyalty that encompasses every aspect of life.<sup>102</sup> But how does it translate into the political realm?

It is of course very true and noteworthy that Christ is pictured in the colours of a powerful political ruler. The Philippians probably could not help thinking of political notables when hearing this scene of great homage. They probably could not help thinking of the emperor. But does this necessarily imply antagonism? The question presumably boils down to one of *divine prerogatives*. Are there areas, actions, gestures which are exclusively due to God and no-one else? These questions, it seems, were answered in widely different ways in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, from increasingly militant groups in Palestine, who saw it as God's prerogative to rule

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. the εἷς formulae in 1 Tim 2:5, Eph 4:5 which include God and Christ. About the problem of Christological monotheism cf. L. Hurtado, *One Lord, One God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

<sup>101</sup> That is, if the κύριοι refer to earthly authorities, not to gods, which, too, could attract this title.

<sup>102</sup> The Jewish creed in Deut 6:4-5 asks for the undivided heart, for a focussed, primary and ultimate loyalty for God and God's commandments and is affirmed by Jesus (Matth 22:37 and parallels).

alone over his chosen people in the land he had given to them, to Jewish groups who expressed their political loyalty to the Empire on their religious premises.<sup>103</sup>

Certainly Jews and early Christians would have been agreed that no religious worship can be offered to a purely human being. Where such gestures were asked for it caused a great deal of anxiety to both Jewish and emerging Christian communities and a resistant and defiant attitude was to be expected as a response. But even in such a situation, the assessment of political authority in general and Imperial Rome in particular could vary dramatically.<sup>104</sup>

While it is not enough to proclaim God or Christ as Lord to cause conflict with political rulers it will not do, on the other hand, to narrow the potential field of conflict between Jews/Christians and Imperial Rome to cultic actions such as the burning of incense or lying prostrate in front of an image.<sup>105</sup>

We can imagine the confession of Christ as the ultimate and supreme Lord to take a polemical turn against the ruler(s) of the day if a) these rulers claim divine worship or b) they order the Christian believers to do things that are religiously or ethically compromising for them, or a combination of both.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For former cf. Josephus' brief account on Judas the Galilean, who deemed it unacceptable to acknowledge mortals besides God as ruler (*Bell.* 2.118). For the latter cf. e.g. Lendon, *Empire*, 162: "...even the Jews, singled out by ancient authors as grudging in this respect, erected in their synagogues shields, crowns, plaques and inscriptions in honour of the emperor". The practice of praying for the emperor was later gladly taken over by Christians, cf. 1 Tim 2:1.2.

<sup>104</sup> Hans-Georg Gradl has impressively shown that a similar situation (namely persecution of a religious minority) and similar religious convictions (monotheism and therefore refusal to give divine honours to an emperor) can lead to two totally different coping strategies within vastly different worldviews: In the case of the book of Revelation it is uncompromising, dualistic and focussed on endurance and divine intervention. In the case of Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium* it is diplomatic, apologetic, loyal and focussed on the restoration of minority rights and their participation in the wider society (H.-G. Gradl, 'Kaisertum und Kaiserkult: Ein Vergleich zwischen Philos *Legatio ad Gaium* und der Offenbarung des Johannes' in *NTS* 56.1 (2010), 116-138).

<sup>105</sup> Pace Cullmann, who is convinced that the persecution of Christians was a tragedy which could have been easily avoided if only the Roman state had not insisted on a *cultic* gesture of loyalty (O. Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 53-55).

<sup>106</sup> More recent research cautions against isolating the Imperial cult from its sophisticated network of religious allegiances (Beard-North-Price, *Religions*, 348). Even in the general persecutions erupting in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christians were suspect because of their overall refusal to uphold the socio-political-religious fabric of Roman society. The notion of a "religious single-combat between devotion to Christ and the cult of Caesar" is misleading (Barclay, 'Roman Religion', 354; similarly Beard-North-Price, *Religions*, 361). Still, I suggest that when the head of political power orders his Christian subjects to commit compromising actions it can be easily imagined how the confession 'Christ is Lord' takes a sharp, polemical ring over against 'Caesar is Lord'. Caesar then usurps God's prerogatives not just by virtue of presenting himself as divine but by claiming the ultimate power to tell people how to live.

We see then, that Paul is tapping into a rich and charged tradition of Jewish monotheism by composing or quoting v.10-11 in the Christ poem. This monotheism has an exclusive edge, which turns polemical and is non-negotiable when idolatry is the issue or when divine and Imperial orders conflict, but obviously can be considerably blunted or negotiated when loyalty and obedience in general as rendered to various political rulers is the concern.

### **b) The incomparable Lord**

Is Jesus compared to anybody else in the poem? At first glance the expression of Lord in v.11 serves mainly to contrast with the humiliated slave (2:7) who is of course one and the same person at different stages of his career. Jesus, the one who humbled himself, is ὑπερύψωσεν (v.9). Within the perspective of Christ's career the question has arisen regarding the surplus somebody could be given who had been in the form of God in the first place (2:6).<sup>107</sup> Some scholars suggest that ὑπερύψωσεν has to be taken as a superlative rather than comparative in the sense of 'most high'.<sup>108</sup> After reaching the lowest possible point, death on a cross, Christ has been lifted to the highest station. To express his exaltation Christ is not compared with anybody else other than his former 'humble self', though such a comparison with somebody else is not excluded in the New Testament.<sup>109</sup> While we are inclined to ask 'Exalted over whom?' it is precisely the character of this brief passage to talk in the most generalized and comprehensive language.<sup>110</sup> There are the knees bowed and the tongues that confess Christ's Lordship. It is likely that the Philippians or Paul imagine this scene with the help of their experiences of homage rendered to political grandees or gods. They might also carry images and stories about such scenes deeply embedded in their collective psyche.<sup>111</sup> The scene is evocative but brief and does not consciously deploy imagery and rituals from scenes of contemporary political

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<sup>107</sup> Käsemann thinks that the surplus is the bestowal of the name. "Christus ist nicht mehr das verborgene Gottwesen. Er wird nun offenbart und herrscht in gewisser Weise manifest" (Käsemann, 'Analyse', 83).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Käsemann, 'Analyse', 83 and Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 27; Wright, 'Jesus Christ' 87.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Hebr.1:4 where Christ is said to be κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων.

<sup>110</sup> It is interesting that Paul is quite fond of this kind of generalized language ('always', 'in every way', 'whatever', 'any') in Philippians, cf. Phil. 1:4; 1:18; 2:1; 4:8.

<sup>111</sup> Hofius thinks that imagery of God's throne is deeply embedded in early Christian religious language without pointing to any specific ritual such as an oriental tripartite enthronement scheme (*contra* Käsemann) (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 28).



homage in a concrete and elaborate way.<sup>112</sup> No authority, no king or emperor is given the honour to be at least mentioned as subject or opponent of Christ in this amazing painting of Christ's exaltation.<sup>113</sup> The towering figures of Christ and God completely fill up the canvas, those acclaiming Christ remain shadowy, faceless, lumped together as a collective or an anonymous 'anybody'.

As we have seen before, Christ is given τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα. Among others Käsemann states "dass hier die Gottesprädikation des griechischen AT auf Jesus übertragen wird..."<sup>114</sup> Hofius states: "Der Ausdruck 'der Name über alle Namen' kann als seine Umschreibung des hochheiligen Gottesnamens, d.h. als eine mit 'Kyrios' gleichwertige Wiedergabe des Tetragramms verstanden werden."<sup>115</sup> While previously the point of contrast or comparison was Jesus' lower self, the point of comparison is god-oriented now: Jesus is given the same authority and honour as YHWH. Like ὑπερύψωσεν this expression τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα strangely oscillates between 'a thing incomparable' and 'a thing comparable'. Alain Badiou captures this very aptly and subtly in remarking that the name above all other names does not just supersede all other names, but is able to transcend them without destroying them: "Tous les noms véridiques sont 'au-dessus de tout nom'. Ils se laissent décliner et déclarer, comme le fait la symbolique mathématique, dans toutes les langues, selon toutes les coutumes, et par le travers de toutes les différences... Paul, nous y avons insisté, n'est pas dialecticien. L'universel n'est pas la négation de la particularité."<sup>116</sup>

This notion is likely in keeping with central features of Biblical God-language: God is God's own standard and in that sense not comparable to anything. The creator is on an altogether different plane from the created world. Yet because God is

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<sup>112</sup> It is a very different story in Revelation, where the Christological creed is polemically sharpened up against imperial claims. Cf. the list in Gradl, 'Kaisertum', 11f.: "Ebenso spiegeln sich in der Visionswelt der Johannes-Offenbarung die Realia des Kaiserkults" (ibid., 11).

<sup>113</sup> Georgi draws attention to the interesting detail that in *Sapientia Salomonis* it is the unbelievers who offer acclamations when the righteous ones are at last vindicated, D. Georgi, 'Der vorpaulinische Hymnus Phil 2,6-11' in E. Dinkler, *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964), 263-293 (287).

It is noteworthy that Phil 2:9-11 does not even differentiate between 'believers' and 'unbelievers', between those saved and not saved, though Paul clearly has such categories ready at hand (Cf. Phil. 1:28).

<sup>114</sup> Käsemann, 'Analyse', 84.

<sup>115</sup> Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 27.

<sup>116</sup> Badiou, *Fondation*, 118.

perceived as entering the world according to the Biblical witnesses - by communicating with it in various degrees – localisations, likenesses and comparisons can tentatively be spoken of.<sup>117</sup> While I do not wish to deny that the Christ poem can be used as a ‘song of defiance’ in the face of political oppression, I would like to underline the deep sense of God/Christ as the incomparable one that suffuses the Christ poem. In this view, God’s power and status can by definition not be usurped – the mere suggestion is ridiculous and blasphemous.

The language of the poem then, is solemn and awe-filled, not polemical and antagonistic. We have a scene of homage, but no description of disloyalty. We have a panorama of universal worship but no warnings against idolatry. We have the portrait of a great King, but not even a hint to any potential rival. The inner world of the poem is completely absorbed with talking about the incomparable one.

### **5.2.3.2 A Very Different Lord: Polemic Against Imperial Power?**

Some scholarly voices, however, would dispute the view presented above. To them the features in the poem that liken Christ to other rulers are more impressive than those that make him look ‘incomparable’. At the same time it has been suggested that Christ’s *style* of ruling makes him look very different from other rulers and even shows him to be in contrast to them. To these suggestions we turn now:

#### **a) A different Lord**

A few scholars have suggested that Christ is not just portrayed as the ultimate and supreme lord but as the morally superior and astonishingly *different* lord from other lords, in particular from ‘lord Caesar’.

Peter Oakes emphasizes the similarities between Christ and the emperor that are visible in the poem: Both got their authority from a third party, it was approved and confirmed. Both set an example with their entire life.<sup>118</sup> To serve in a self-sacrificial

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<sup>117</sup> A good example of this tension is Solomon dedicating the temple in 1 Kings 8 where he says “I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in for ever” (8:13) and later on adds that “Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!” (8:27).

<sup>118</sup> “The Emperor was presented as the self-effacing man, devoted to others. He was therefore the right man to rule” (Oakes, *People*, 159). Similarly Heen: “...an immortal (i.e., one who is destined to enjoy

way was seen as becoming for an emperor, too, though Oakes admits that to go as far as to be crucified certainly blows open the comparison.<sup>119</sup> Interestingly this does not lead to the emperor taking his cue from Christ nor the other way round but to Christ replacing the emperor as the symbolic head of a societal value system.<sup>120</sup> Christ resembles a (good) emperor though he eclipses and replaces the existing one in the end.<sup>121</sup> The strength of Oakes' proposal seems to lie in his acknowledgment that there was indeed a positive ruler ideal in antiquity and not all people in high positions were automatically portrayed or experienced in the blackest possible terms, though a degree of opportunism and flattery must always be taken into account. The emperor is not just the dark foil for Christ but has features that are recognised in Christ's story, including self-sacrificial service. What remains unclear in this proposal is why Christ needs to eclipse and remove the emperor and the ethical system sponsored by him. If the Philippians can see the emperor shining through in the Christ poem because the former's authority, too, was legitimated by "self-sacrificing, morally good acts"<sup>122</sup> how can the emperor at the same time be "the high-status man, whose Roman Empire has commanded the hardening of an already stratified Mediterranean society into stone" who is now *challenged* by the "new lord whose command is τὸ αὐτο φρονεῖτε and who enjoins ταπεινοφροσύνη"?<sup>123</sup> Surely if Christ is replacing the emperor as the source and embodiment of status thinking and haughty pride the *tertium comparationis* between Christ and the emperor cannot be self-sacrificial service.

Wright on the other hand takes it for granted that Christ is not just compared but negatively *contrasted* with any oriental despot.<sup>124</sup> The latter were only too well

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everlasting fame), because of his/her service to humanity, receives veneration upon death" (Heen, Phil 2:6-11', 141).

<sup>119</sup> Oakes, *People*, 160. On the same page Oakes sums up the balance between 'Christ like/unlike the emperor' thus: "...I do not think that a Philippian hearing verses 6-8 would think of the Emperor. It is the use of verses 6-8 in the logic of verse 9 that would sound like a legitimation of authority, a legitimation cast in the Imperial mould" (Ibid., 160).

<sup>120</sup> Oakes, *People*, xiv.

<sup>121</sup> "The social and political authorities, under whom the Philippian Christians faced the social pressures that threatened perseverance and unity, had been relativized by Christ. Christ, not the Emperor, was now the true figure of authority. Not only worship but the key imperatives for living each day were changed by this." Oakes, *People*, 170.

<sup>122</sup> Oakes, *People*, 208.

<sup>123</sup> Oakes, *People*, 206.

<sup>124</sup> There is "an implied contrast between Christ and someone else" (Wright, 'Jesus Christ', 58). "Over against the standard picture of oriental despots, who understood their position as something to be used

known for using their power and authority for their own ends while Christ is strikingly different. Wright similarly to Oakes concludes from this observation that Christ, who embodies a qualitatively different authority from the emperor, eclipses and replaces him.

Christ may be a better Lord in comparison to the emperor or a good Lord in contrast to the emperor – in the end Christ’s Lordship annuls the rule of Caesar.

Yet another approach is to deny any meaningful comparison or contrast because Christ’s rule and authority are on an altogether different plane from earthly ones. Dean Pinter, who underlines like Oakes and Wright the totally different style of power, which Christ embodies, concludes from it that “...whereas the power that concerns emperors...is power as ‘domination’, Paul offers a vision that is not interested in this kind of power.”<sup>125</sup> Paul simply ignores such figures: the emperor is “pushed off the map” of Paul’s worldview.<sup>126</sup> This proposal possibly points to issues I tried to highlight in the previous section: Christ and Christ’s attributes are not easily fed into a calculation with earthly rulers where the shares of power each player holds are mutually diminishing. I still find it rash to claim that Christ’s power is on a totally different plane, neatly separated from those of earthly rulers. After all ‘all there is’ including rulers ultimately bow in homage before Christ the Lord.

Two more questions are useful to gain more light in this problem: Is there an implied contrast with a high-status person, possibly the emperor in v.6?

And: How can we characterize the authority Christ gains in his exaltation?

## **b) The servant Lord**

There is one possible exception to the statement that the poem is non-polemical and not targeting anybody in particular. This is v. 6 where it is said of Christ: οὐχ

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for their own advantage, Jesus understood his position to *mean* self-negation, the vocation described in vv. 7-8.” (ibid.,83). Similarly Heen: “...it was Jesus *rather than* the emperor who was deserving of the honorific *isa theo*... Vv. 6-7 seem to draw a comparison between two figures...” (Heen, ‘Phil 2:6-11’, 139). Against Wright, see Fowl’s and Oakes’ criticism of seeing automatically a despot in v. 6 in Fowl, *Story*, 57 and Oakes, *People*, 131.

<sup>125</sup> D. Pinter, *Divine and Imperial Power: A Comparative Analysis of Paul and Josephus* (unpubl. PhD Doctoral thesis; Durham: University of Durham, 2009), 221.

<sup>126</sup> Pinter, *Power*, 225.

ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. The slightly opaque phrase has itself seen a long history of scholarly debate.<sup>127</sup> Today a majority of scholars seems to go along with Hoover's suggestion that the phrase must be understood as a whole in an almost proverbial sense and should be translated with 'he did not use it for his own advantage.'<sup>128</sup> At this stage we do seem to be indeed invited to make a comparison: "Unlike whom" did Christ not use his unique position for his own ends? The proposal that the unique situation recalls parallels with Adam's unique situation before the fall has its own difficulties and has been criticized among others by Wright.<sup>129</sup> Wright suggests that it best applies if taken in a broad sense.<sup>130</sup> Other authors suggested that Christ's humble behaviour implicitly criticizes the selfish behaviour of high status people.<sup>131</sup> Wright's suggestion of a broad use of the phrase stands in some tension with his conviction that the emperor is the black foil for this verse (s.above, 5.2.3.2). If the phrase in v.6 is to be translated with 'he did not use it for his own advantage' we might assume a fairly wide range of possible contrasts and applications. 'Not using a privilege for one's own advantage' certainly has the potential of criticizing a very widespread human attitude, possibly slanted towards those who have a lot of privileges but not exclusively so. This still offers a wide range of candidates: From high-ranking despots to the local town councils to members of the elite and slave owners in Philippi examples might come to mind.

If ἀρπαγμός is best read as "robbery" or "booty" as Vollenweider suggests, things look differently. In that case we have numerous associations and allusions with rulers, who overstepped their mark by usurping what was not theirs and through

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<sup>127</sup> This long and complicated history is admirably summed up and evaluated by Wright, 'Jesus Christ', 63-82 and idem, 'Ἀρπαγμός and the Meaning of Philippians 2:5-11', *JTS* 37 (1986), 321-352.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. R.W. Hoover, 'The Harpagmos Enigma' *HTR* 64 (1971), 95-119. But note critical voices such as S. Vollenweider, 'Der "Raub" der Gottgleichheit' in idem, *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie* (WUNT 144; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 263-284 (266-268: 'Phil 2,6b als Idiom?').

<sup>129</sup> Wright, 'Jesus Christ', 88.

<sup>130</sup> Adam and Christ are contrasted "but not in strict parallelism..." (Wright, 'Jesus Christ', 91).

<sup>131</sup> Note that Oakes' but also de Vos' proposals about the ethical consequences of Phil.2:5-11 seem to target mostly people of higher status in the Philippian church: Those of higher status must not shrink back from socializing with their weaker and economically suffering brothers and sisters (Oakes, *People*, 100-102). Alternatively "...Paul is calling on those Philippian Christians who were Roman citizens to renounce their citizenship and consider themselves as slaves-without-rights or privileges-within the realm of the Roman Empire" (de Vos, *Community*, 286). I think both proposals are worth considering, though Paul seems to address the church in more inclusive terms, such as ἕκαστος in 2:4.

grasping after God-likeness.<sup>132</sup> The ‘black foil’ theory that implies the emperor or earthly rulers seems much more feasible in this case.

### c) The paradoxical Lord

Could it be, as it was already hinted at in Pinter’s proposal, that Christ’s Lordship transcends or deconstructs common notions of authority and power altogether? Is there a paradox along the lines of ‘the humble one is the great one’? There is certainly a very deep and shocking loss of face, status and honour in the tale of Christ. The downward movement which culminates in the brutal and most degrading death of crucifixion is certainly far more than any noble self-denial of a ruler in the interest of his people.<sup>133</sup> The vulnerability and exposedness of Christ is only tempered by the insistence that he is in control, consciously choosing and embracing his fate.<sup>134</sup> The διό in v. 9 makes it clear that the exaltation does not wipe out the previous humiliation and suffering as an unfortunate accident which is thankfully overcome through the happy end in v.9-11, as a much stronger ἄλλα would.<sup>135</sup>

If we are to go along with Hoover’s proverbial rendering of v.6b, Christ refused to use for his own advantage what he rightfully possessed and gave up the privileges he already owned.<sup>136</sup> In that reading it is unlikely that Christ despises honour, power and authority *per se*. The whole poem cumulates quite unapologetically in a vision of high status and great power. The exaltation is more than just the divine ‘placet’ on the correct Christian attitude of self-sacrificial humility. Still, the obedience unto the cross is the center of the poem and gives the story of Christ its abiding mark. It gives Christ’s exaltation and high status the character of something that is hard won, not

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<sup>132</sup> For parallels of ‘robber kings’ and ἰσοθεΐα in Judaism and Hellenism cf. Vollenweider, ‘“Raub”’, 271-278.

<sup>133</sup> de Vos reminds us that the Philippians confessed one „as their new Lord...[who had]...been convicted and executed as a traitor, a rebel and a slave” (de Vos, *Community*, 285). There is indeed nothing in the death of Christ to commend the Christian faith to a Greco-Roman audience. But does it already make of Christ an anti-Roman revolutionary?

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Phil 2: 6 (οὐχ ἡγήσατο), 7 (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν), 8 (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν).

<sup>135</sup> Wright makes the intriguing suggestion that with the hindsight of faith we discern the humiliation as the revelation of what it means to be ‘equal with God’ (Wright, ‘Jesus Christ’, 89).

<sup>136</sup> Wright makes it clear that it is illogical to hold that Christ did not aspire to grasp divine likeness because he did not want to use it for his own advantage. You only can use or abuse what you own. Hence μορφή θεοῦ and ἴσα θεῷ (v.6) must refer to the same thing (Wright, ‘Jesus Christ’, 83).

something which he just naturally and cheerfully owns.<sup>137</sup> But equally it has to be stressed that the story does not end there.<sup>138</sup> The poem clearly describes a way ‘from-to’, there is vindication of the person of Christ, not just affirmation of his deeds and his way as exemplary. The humiliation is eventually reversed and overcome.

We do not learn from the poem whether Christ’s rule as Lord bears the stamp of humility, selflessness and possibly charity as one might expect given the first part of his career. It is not far-fetched to credit Christ’s rule with such attributes in the wider NT context. But from the textual evidence he might just as well rule with an iron rod once the humiliation is over. Similarly it is difficult to assess whether the ‘all there is’ gives homage voluntarily or forced. Käsemann describes Christ’s rule in rather violent terminology<sup>139</sup> whereas Hofius insists that the homage happens voluntarily as a fully-fledged confession of faith.<sup>140</sup> I think once again that we get very little help from the rather static scene of enthronement and acclamation. Ἐξομολογέω can express a range of meanings from confessing one’s sin (cp. Mt 3:6) to praising God. The ὅτι in Phil.2:11 is a variation of the LXX Isaiah 45:23.<sup>141</sup> It might indicate a shift from confessing to ‘mere’ acknowledging. On balance I am inclined to see more positive overtones in the passage than negative ones not least because of the redemptive perspective of the Isaiah passage. But we must not push things too far. Once more we have to admit that this question is probably outside the focus of our brief passage. It looks very much as if the poem is not overly bothered with questions of sincere or voluntary homage to the person exalted. I assume that people in

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<sup>137</sup> “Die eschatologische Würde des Erhöhten ist ‘erkämpft’ und seine einzigartige Macht-und Herrschaftsstellung nicht selbstverständliche Folge seiner göttlichen Natur, sondern im Gehorsam errungen” (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 95).

<sup>138</sup> I think there is a different emphasis here from 1 Cor 1: 18-31 where the power of God is paradoxically seen in God’s weakness. Käsemann’s criticism of Barth who sees in the poem more a dialectical paradox (“...der Erniedrigte ist der Erhöhte...” ) rather than a three-stage-narrative is in a similar vein and is valuable. (Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 58).

<sup>139</sup> Christ is “...Weltversöhner und Weltüberwinder zugleich”, he pacifies the world through subjugation “indem er der kosmischen Verfehdung ein Ende setzt und die Rebellen unter seine pax zwingt”(Käsemann, ‘Analyse’, 88).

<sup>140</sup> Hofius is right in seeing the formula κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός as being used almost exclusively “als eine Äusserung des Glaubens und Bekennens” in the New Testament (Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 38). Romans 10:12 and 1 Cor 12:3 are strong points to underline his case. However, there is the idea in the New Testament that evil powers *nolens volens* acknowledge God or Christ for who they are, cf. Mark 1:24 and James 2:19. To think that v. 10 ‘in the name of Jesus’ points to the salvific confession formula ‘calling upon the name of the Lord’ overstretches the evidence (*pace* Hofius, *Christushymnus*, 38).

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Romans 14: 11 where the same verse is rendered without the ὅτι and Romans 15:9 where we find the verb again with a Dative following and where it clearly means ‘praising’.

antiquity thought that such a scene of acclamation told them more about the one who got it than about the people who offered it. The one who gets it is was obviously capable of eliciting it, if through noble deeds rather than force so much the better.<sup>142</sup> Christ is worthy to receive universal acclamation. This is the core message.

Christ's Lordship then, is hard won and is meaningfully linked to Christ's descent and shameful death. The exaltation both confirms the humble descent as an appropriate stance that is pleasing to God and reverses it. Both aspects will be very important for the Christian community in Philippi, as we shall see. What is much harder to assess from the poem is the question, how exactly Christ exercises his rule and whether it is set and proclaimed over against the dark foil of an existing ruler.

## 5.2.4 Summary

### 5.2.4.1 Summing up our observations so far we can say:

- Christ's Lordship is portrayed as ultimate and final, supreme and universal. Spatially there is unlimited scope. Temporally there is a dynamic striving for ever growing acknowledgment of that Lordship, which is already established and confessed in the church but will only at some point in the future be fully revealed or realised. This ties in well with O'Donovan's narrative of ever growing acclamation of Christ as Lord, not least in the world of politics.
- We are not told how the present confession of the Christian church of Jesus' Lordship relates to the church's interactions with present and visible lords. The believers who supposedly confess Jesus as Lord already here and now are not highlighted as a special group in the poem. This is in keeping with the important notion of both O'Donovan and Yoder that Christ is Lord of the universe, not merely of the church.
- The language and imagery used in the poem are bound to evoke scenes and figures in the political world. On the whole though the political vocabulary is kept fairly broad and unspecific. Though Paul evokes Old Testament imagery

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<sup>142</sup> Lendon gives some hints that aristocrats loathed "slavish and insincere praise" (Lendon, *Empire*, 113) and that a rule mainly through terror was not seen as very artful (ibid., 119).



of God as the ultimate saviour-king and although the title ‘Christ’ has of course always royal connotations, we have no clear trajectory of Christ as fulfilling Davidic hopes in a transposed key, as O’Donovan suggests.

- Christ’s exalted status is compared with his former humble self and with God. Some of the superlatives and generic and comprehensive ways of speaking give Christ’s Lordship an air of the ‘incomparable’. There is no competitor set up against Christ and we have not the faintest trace of a conflict or struggle. Even the death on the cross is stylized as obedience Christ rendered to God and not as the culmination of a conflict.<sup>143</sup>
- The rulers of this world are no doubt included in ‘every tongue’ and ‘every knee’. In that sense every rule is ultimately linked with Christ’s. But rulers are not singled out in any sense. This could be seen as tying in with O’Donovan’s notion that Christ both affirms and realigns rule. It could also be in keeping with O’Donovan’s suggestions that rulers will not have an active part to play *qua rulers* at the eschatological consummation. They are lumped together in a comprehensive but unspecific ‘all there is’ in Paul’s tableau. Christ’s interaction with other rulers is of no interest in the poem itself, unlike in O’Donovan’s and to a degree in Yoder’s narrative.
- It could be argued, though, that if rulers are no visible agents *within the poem*, the Roman emperor still serves as the dark foil for the poem *in the background* of the poem. The pointed ‘not like’ in v.6b may give a strong clue in that direction, especially if ἄρπαγμος is read as ‘robbery’. This could indeed be seen as a strong critical glare towards the emperor and rulers like him. This negative assessment of much of earthly rule, especially in the light of Christ, would be one of Yoder’s central concerns.
- The monotheistic tradition with its sharp and exclusive edge against idolatry that Paul taps in v.10-11 could give us a strong clue as to how the poem was understood. To worship God as the ultimate and supreme King of all does not

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<sup>143</sup> *Contra* Fowl who states that “the claims of v.8 implicitly subvert Roman imperial power” (Fowl, *Philippians*, 100).

necessarily lead to antagonism with earthly rulers. However, if earthly rule was perceived as idolatrous or compromising, conflict would be close at hand. If we can show the Imperial worship to be a burning issue in the remaining letter to the Philippians it makes sense to highlight this potential of the poem.

- Christ's high status is closely linked to his previous humiliation, both affirming and reversing it. The high status is hard won and laboured for. Though Christ's humiliation is commended we cannot be sure in what way it marks his exaltation and shows him as a Lord unlike any others. What is marvelled at in the poem is the willing descent to the uttermost depth and the astonishing exaltation following it. But the main thrust of the poem is not to say: 'Look, how humble this Lord is' but 'Look, how God has vindicated his humble servant'. Yoder would want to emphasize much more the altogether different character of Christ's Lordship that criticizes and subverts other lords. O'Donovan has more time for Christ's vindication.
- On the whole, as especially Oakes' proposal shows, Christ's Lordship can be shown to have features of both good and bad 'emperors'. This makes it more likely that the political imagery is a tentative analogy rather than a dark foil.
- This analogy can be sharpened up into a dark foil in a given context, when a given ruler poses or is experienced as a direct rival and opponent of Christ. The potential for exclusivity in Jewish-Christian monotheism and a possible aside in v.6b to 'robber kings' can lead the way towards such a reading.

The vivid imagery of the poem is thus full of potential and possibilities. It opens many doors both towards seeing Christ as an unlikely and incomparable ruler, who will not interact on the same level with other rulers, and as a good ruler, who makes earthly rulers look wanting in their tendency towards robbery and proud violence. It could pave the way towards a victorious Christ who gradually conquers all other rulers, as well as towards a humble Christ, who will not subject rulers but subvert their very task. It taps traditions of seeing God as the rulers of rulers, who assigns them a place beneath his supreme authority, and traditions of a jealous, exclusive God, who will corner and challenge idolatrous competitors. All these potentials are

just hinted at and often not followed up in greater clarity. We noticed that both Yoder's and O'Donovan's narratives would certainly have a foothold in this portrait of Christ's Lordship in many places. But even more we realize that the poem is far from sketching out a narrative that includes Christ's interaction with earthly rulers.

It is time to ask how Paul himself understood the poem at the time he wrote Philippians and what he made of its political imagery.

## 5.2.5 Paul's Use of the Poem and Summary

### 5.2.5.1 Paul's Use of the Poem

So far we have investigated the poem in a fairly isolated manner, with only a few glances to other texts and historical data. But the poem, while standing out, is clearly introduced by Paul in v.5: Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The τοῦτο might well point backwards and forwards, both summing up a cluster of attitudes and virtues Paul just commended to the Philippians in 2:1-4<sup>144</sup> and looking on to the attitude Christ embodied. The similar structure of μηδέν...ἀλλὰ (2:3 and 2:4) and οὐχ...ἀλλὰ (2:6b.7a) and the repetition of ἡγούμενοι (2:3) and ἡγήσατο (2:6b) makes it even clearer that the point of correspondence between the Philippians and Christ which Paul wants to point out here is one of *attitude*. The unselfish behaviour of Christ is contrasted with the potentially selfish behaviour of the Philippians and vice versa.<sup>145</sup> I think we can conclude from this that at least in Paul's application v.6 it is not primarily meant to polemically target anybody in a position of authority. Paul admonishes the Philippians to have the same attitude as Christ without differentiating between higher and lower ranking church members. Paul does not paint the image of a selfish ruler but the image of a selfless Christ as opposed to a widespread human attitude of seeking first one's own advantage, which sadly does not stop at the threshold of the church.

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<sup>144</sup> Paul mostly presses for attitudes of harmony and unity, cf. his vocabulary of κοινωνία, τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἐν φρονούντες (2:1-2).

<sup>145</sup> The Philippians are warned of ἐριθεία, κενοδοξία (2:3) and told not to be τὰ ἑαυτῶν...σκοποῦντες (2:4).

One feature of the Christ-like attitude Paul describes in 2: 1-4, ταπεινοφροσύνη, is echoed in 2:8 as ἑταπείνωσεν. Clearly Christ serves as a direct, imitable model at this point. However, a lot of desirable attitudes mentioned in 2:1-4 such as ἀγάπη, κοινωνία, σπλάγγχνα, οἰκτριμοί have no parallel in the Christ poem, though love and mercy would seem natural connotations of the self-sacrifice of Christ (cf. eg Gal. 2:20). As far as the important qualities of unity and harmony (Phil 2:3) are concerned it is clear that Christ is not the direct exemplar, after all he is on his own. His attitude of selfless humiliation is more the *basis* for harmony than the exemplary model. If the Philippians converge in τοῦτο φρονεῖν, if they have the mind of Christ they will also be able to be of the same mind or τὸ ἐν/τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν (2:2), because focusing on Christ's attitude will encourage the Philippians to seek τὰ ἑτέρων (2:4).<sup>146</sup> On the other hand not doing so will end in κενοδοξία (2:3) and in ἐριθεία (2:3), the opposite of love according to 1:16 and 17a.

The transition between the end of the poem and its context is more abrupt. To be sure the term ὥστε (2:12) refers to what has been said ('therefore, for this reason') and connects what follows to the poem. Paul continues the direct admonition he started in 1:27 which is signalled by the address ἀγαπητοὶ μου. (2:12). But though the important term ὑπήκοος of v.8 is repeated as ὑπηκούσατε in v.12 and though the theme of disharmony is touched upon in v.14 (χωρὶς γογγυσμῶν καὶ διαλογισμῶν) the moving account of Christ's descent is scarcely remembered and the stunning tale of Christ's ascent is virtually non-existent in this immediately following passage.<sup>147</sup>

The introductory admonition only needs the first part of the poem, strictly speaking.<sup>148</sup> It is possible that Paul wants to encourage the Philippian Christians about whose struggle he has just talked in 1:27-30 by quoting or writing the second part of the poem. The Philippians are graced (ἐχαρίσθη 1:29) with the experience to suffer for Christ. Christ is graced (ἐχαρίσατο 2:9) with the name above all names. We see possible hints here at the various ways how Christ and the believers are

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<sup>146</sup> Fowl rightly emphasizes the φρονεῖν theme in Philippians and makes it clear that this includes ethical deliberation, not just blind copying of attitudes and actions (S. E. Fowl, 'Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5-11' in Martin-Dodds, *Christology*, 140-153 (149).

<sup>147</sup> "In its immediate context, Paul almost seems to forget about the sweeping theological metaphors of the hymn" (Perkins, 'Theology', 95).

<sup>148</sup> "...Paul's answer would seem immeasurably larger than the problem which evoked it" (F. Craddock, *Philippians* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985], 43).

interlinked, which will be spelt out in greater clarity in chapter 3: Christ is the exemplar, normative paradigm<sup>149</sup> encouraging forerunner and simply the realm for the Philippian believers.<sup>150</sup> He is not least the reason for their suffering in the first place.

On the whole the poem is not exploited and applied as specifically and fully as we might expect. This once again cautions against seeing the poem as narrowly responding to a single issue or even as being specifically tailored to reply to a certain problem.<sup>151</sup> I suggest that even Paul's particular use is not the only possible reading. The poem is like a diamond that turns round and gives off flashes of red, blue, green. It would be wrong to turn around and paint it in one colour, claiming that this is all there is. This is also true for our postulated Pauline reading of the poem. Still our interest at this stage is in how Paul used this unique text when he wrote Philippians.

### 5.2.5.2 Summary

#### a) Summing up our textual observations we can say the following:

- Paul uses the poem ethically. He wants the Philippians to focus on the story of Christ and to learn from him an attitude of humility, which is opposed to purely self-centered deliberations and a life driven by the reckless strife for honour and status.
- The attitudes of humility and 'not taking advantage' are in the foreground.
- Having the mind of Christ will enable the Philippian Christians to be of the same mind. As people 'in Christ' to have the attitude that was 'in Christ' will build up and form them as a community.

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<sup>149</sup> It seems to me, though Fowl critically engages with Käsemann, that his 'exemplar' is very similar to Käsemann's 'Urbild': Christ is the normative paradigm which cannot simply be imitated (Cf. Käsemann, 'Analyse', 81). Cf. also Larry Hurtado's felicitous expression of a 'lordly example' (Hurtado, 'Lordly Example').

<sup>150</sup> Paul writes to those who are "ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ" (1:1). On an exegetical meta-level Käsemann is right in translating ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (2:4) as the ecclesial space rather than the mind of Christ (Käsemann, 'Analyse', 57), though in the context, which clearly speaks of attitudes it is certainly correct to translate it as 'Christ's mind'.

<sup>151</sup> *Contra* Kreitzer, who says based on the hypothesis of a flourishing emperor cult in Philippi: "This is an attractive possibility which may help explain *the need* for a confession of faith such as that provided in 2:10-11" (Kreitzer, 'When he at Last', 125, my emphasis). Stowers rightly remarks that "All human utterances are not polemical or apologetic reactions" (Stowers, 'Friends', 121).

- The second part of the poem, which tells about Christ becoming the Lord of all seems superfluous in the context of the precise ethical admonition. However, because Christ is not just the exemplar but the ‘lordly example’ (Hurtado), the second part of the poem underlines the binding character of his humble example.
- Because Christ is not just an ethical example but the ‘Urbild’ (Käsemann), there is also an element of hope and encouragement in the poem, an aspect that is foreshadowed by the second part and that will be brought out more clearly in Philippians 3.
- We could say in O’Donovan’s words, that Christ’s Lordship constitutes the Philippian church as a ‘community under authority’. They gain profile and identity through conforming to Christ’s ‘lordly example’. We could say with Yoder that Christ’s Lordship has foremost normative character that bids the church under his authority to live as he did and to embody humble service in their midst.

What then, becomes of the emperor as possible dark foil? What becomes of the potential of resisting the Imperial cult? The immediate context of the poem is remarkably silent about anything to do with idolatry and false loyalties. Just as we hear nothing about loyalty struggles or temptations for idolatrous gestures on the inside of the poem, Paul is completely silent about these issues in the wider context of the poem.

In short, Paul shows no interest whatsoever to discuss what it might mean *for the Roman emperor* that Christ is Lord. He furthermore shows no interest in discussing what it means for the Christians *in their interaction with rulers* to confess that Christ is Lord. The potential of Christ to expose, chide or replace any earthly ruler that is there in the poem is almost a red herring as far as Paul’s use of it is concerned. What matters enormously for Paul is not the issue of challenging and resisting proud rulers but the conformity of the church towards its Lord. We could almost say that Paul forgoes *one political reading*, namely the direct setting up of Lord Jesus vs. Lord Caesar and goes for *another political reading*, the shaping of a community under

ultimate authority. Paul talks about Christ by using positively and negatively images of political rulers such as the emperor, but he does not talk *about* the emperor.

Paul emphasizes one aspect that is also primary and foremost in Yoder's and O'Donovan's narrative, namely the constitution of the church as a distinctive social body under the authority of its crucified and risen Lord. Where Yoder and O'Donovan offer subtle proposals about how the role of political authority might be re-affirmed, beaten back, criticized or improved in their encounter with Christ the Lord, Paul is simply silent at this stage.

### **5.3 The Community under Authority – Philippians 3**

After reflecting on the question of how Christ the Lord relates to the lords of this world in the last chapter, I will probe questions about the church in this chapter: In what way is the church portrayed as a political community? What political imagery does Paul deploy to characterize the church? Is this community pictured at a critical distance or even in hostile rejection towards other communities? Does it see itself as the one true community?

Questions like this have already partly been raised and answered in the last chapter.<sup>152</sup>

It has been rightly pointed out that Philippians 3 echoes a number of expressions from the Christ poem. In recent years, interesting proposals have been offered reading Philippians 3 in connection with the Christ poem and against the background of socio-political pressure. I will first outline some of the vocabulary connections between chapter 3 and the poem. Secondly I will describe the outlines of what I call a "socio-political reading of Philippians 3." Thirdly I will present my own reading of the chapter. Fourthly I will try to sum up Paul's use of his political metaphors under two rubrics and fifthly I will reflect on the relationship between the church and the 'state' in the eschatological age.

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<sup>152</sup> Similarly there will be questions about Christ's Lordship to be addressed in this chapter, too. All research questions are closely intertwined and mainly serve as perspectives from which to focus on some issues more sharply at a time than on others.

### 5.3.1 The Poem in Chapter 3

From 3:2 on, where we have Paul's polemical outburst against some opponents who seem to promote circumcision, we come across ἡγέομαι vocabulary (3:7, 8a, 8b), which is also used in 2:6 to describe Christ's attitude. In 3:10 the expression συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ echoes two important expressions of the Christ poem (2:6 and 2:8). A probably less significant repetition is the εὔρεθῶ in 3:9, echoing the εὔρεθείς in 2:7. In 3:18 we find the only other occurrence in the letter besides 2:8 where Paul mentions the σταυρός. From verse 3:19 on, a great number of words from the poem are repeated. The ἐπουρανίων and ἐπιγείων of 2:10 are echoed by τὰ ἐπίγεια and ἐν οὐρανοῖς of 3:19 and 20. Christ who was ὑπάρχων in the form of God (2:6) is matched by the πολίτευμα which ὑπάρχει in heaven. But v.21 is especially noteworthy: ἐταπείνωσεν (2:8) and δόξα (2:11) are echoed by the σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως which will change its shape (μετασχηματίσει, cf. 2:7, σχῆμα) and be made to conform (σύμμορφον cf. 2:6, 7, μορφή) to the σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ. While most of the shared vocabulary refers to the first part of the poem, the content of 3:19-21 is about the exalted Christ as pictured in the second part of the poem. It is clearly very important to investigate how these few verses 3:19-21 cohere with the rest of the chapter and with the overall message of Philippians.

### 5.3.2 Embracing Suffering – Rejecting Rome – Renouncing Status: A Socio-Political Reading of Philippians 3

In this section I will present three features in the recent exegesis of Philippians 3. I should emphasize that the various scholars I mention would not subscribe to all the ideas presented.<sup>153</sup> Still, there is a sufficient 'family resemblance' to form what I would like to call a socio-political reading of Philippians. This reading can be summarized under three headings: Embracing Suffering, Rejecting Rome and Renouncing Status.

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<sup>153</sup> Richard Ascough, for instance, is very critical of a counter-imperial reading of the chapter. Yet he also sees the central problem of the chapter in the competitive striving for honour between rival Christian groups. Ascough's tacit assumption is to equate δόξα with τιμή (Ascough, *Associations*, 145).



### a) Embracing Suffering

As we have just seen, key vocabulary of the Christ poem in 2:5-11 is repeated in chapter 3, most remarkably in 3:10 as συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ and at the end of the chapter, where vocabulary from the poem abounds. Morna Hooker has pioneered the understanding that Philippians 3:20, 21 completes a pattern of interchange.<sup>154</sup> Christ conforms to human beings by humbling himself. The believers in turn conform to Christ in their humble suffering (3:10) and will eventually also be conformed to Christ's glory.<sup>155</sup> This has further encouraged a reading which sees the theme of *avoiding* suffering as prevailing throughout chapter 3. Paul Minear is convinced that the choice between accepting suffering or avoiding it is the main issue: "Paul stressed the necessity for readers to choose between his acceptance of such suffering and his adversaries' avoidance of it (1:28-30; 2:17-21)."<sup>156</sup> The phrase 'enemies of the cross of Christ' in v.18, as well as the reference to people who only care about their belly, seem to fit the bill.<sup>157</sup> Only Christians who endure suffering will be rewarded at the time when a Saviour comes from heaven and transforms their σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως into a body of glory (3:20-21). Some scholars emphasize that Paul rejects all strategies of avoiding suffering on principle and even fuels the flames of conflict.<sup>158</sup>

### b) Rejecting Rome

As we have seen in the introduction (5.1.4. d)) , a number of authors suggest that the Philippians' sufferings were closely related to a conflict with the Roman authorities. Paul suffers at the hands of Imperial Rome, and the Philippians are involved in

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<sup>154</sup> Cf. M. D. Hooker, 'Interchange and Suffering' in idem, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42-55, esp. 46-47.

<sup>155</sup> "The one who was found in the *form* of a slave and the *fashion* of a man, who *humiliated* himself to a shameful death, is going to *refashion* our body of *humiliation*, *conforming* it to his own body of glory" (Hooker, *Adam*, 46).

<sup>156</sup> Minear, 'Singing', 211.

<sup>157</sup> For the former cf. Fowl, *Philippians*, 147, 148, who is convinced that the Philippians want to 'judaize' for reasons of greater safety and must be turned into 'friends of the cross' (ibid., 149) again.

<sup>158</sup> According to Tellbe the Philippians must not join the synagogues "...as a means of mitigating the conflict and escaping suffering; instead, they are to identify with Christ and to face the unavoidable sufferings as true disciples of Christ" (Tellbe, 'Factors', 120). Similarly de Vos: "...it appears that there was a tendency to try and avoid or minimize this conflict on the part of many of the Philippian Christians" (de Vos, *Community*, 266). Paul, on the contrary, "...reinforces attitudes that would sustain or escalate that conflict" (ibid., 286).

similar conflicts with the authorities. The political vocabulary that is used in the Christ hymn and at the end of chapter 3 to portray Christ as the Lord of all and as the Saviour who visits his imperilled people (3:20) is understood as evoking the image of an Imperial visit.<sup>159</sup> In addition, it is assumed that these verses imply an *antagonistic* stance towards the emperor and Rome.<sup>160</sup> There is a momentous struggle of loyalty going on in chapter 3: ‘*Our* πολίτευμα is in heaven’ is set in opposition to ‘yours is in Rome or Roman Philippi’. De Vos offers the most detailed scenario of conflict and proposes a possible oath of loyalty in Philippi.<sup>161</sup> He concludes that in this situation “Paul calls on them [the Philippians] to change their political loyalties.”<sup>162</sup> The Philippians are part of another empire, “at war” with the existing one.<sup>163</sup> The call to walk as good citizens in 1:27 and the mention of the heavenly πολίτευμα, which bracket the main section of Philippians, are seen by him as indicators that the Philippians are addressed as members of an alternative civic community which stands over against the *polis* in which they live.<sup>164</sup>

Tellbe puts it in milder terms in stating that Paul uses “distinctive Roman terminology” in order “to encourage the church not to give its first loyalty to Rome and the emperor but to the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>165</sup>

While the socio-political imagery at the end of chapter 3 is certainly intriguing, the question remains how to interpret the rest of the chapter, especially the first few verses. After all, this is not about loyalty to Rome but about Jewish circumcision!

### c) Renouncing status

A number of authors integrate the circumcision section into a larger theme of status renunciation. What Paul is really interested in here is not so much circumcision, the

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<sup>159</sup> Perkins, ‘Theology’, 93. Also cf. Wright: “The point was that, if things were getting difficult in one’s colonial setting, the emperor would come from the mother city to rescue and liberate his loyal subjects, transforming their situation from danger to safety” (Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 174).

<sup>160</sup> Cf. de Vos: “...an unambiguous contrast [is] drawn between Christ and the Emperor” (de Vos, *Community*, 274).

<sup>161</sup> de Vos, *Community*, 265.

<sup>162</sup> De Vos, *Community*, 281.

<sup>163</sup> De Vos, *Community*, 227, no.152

<sup>164</sup> De Vos, *Community*, 283-284.

<sup>165</sup> Tellbe, ‘Factors’, 111. In general, some of the authors who see Paul contrasting Christ and the emperor are happy to speak about dual citizenship (e.g. Fee, *Philippians*, 379) while others insist it implies that the two citizenships are incommensurate (e.g. Fowl, *Philippians*, 61-62).

law and righteousness, as to give a powerful lesson in renouncing status. Perkins thinks that taking advantage of an earthly community is forbidden to the citizens of the heavenly πολίτευμα: “It is this issue, not a concern about the conditions of righteousness before God that motivated the ‘dogs’ in Philippians 3 to advocate circumcision and kosher observance.”<sup>166</sup> Oakes is more cautious than others, talking about “the main message [which] may be about avoidance of Judaizers. A secondary message, of renunciation of privileges for the sake of Christ, is likely to be heard, too”<sup>167</sup> The specific issue of circumcision serves in a paradigmatic way, linking the Christ hymn with the end of chapter 3. It is widely agreed that Paul describes his own *kenosis* here and encourages the Philippians to do the same by willingly letting go of their privileges. A structure of double imitation is seen to unlock the chapter (cf. 3:17, which is often read together with 1 Cor 11:11).<sup>168</sup> Paul imitates Christ by humbling himself and by giving up everything he was proud of.<sup>169</sup> The Philippians are called to do the same in their context.<sup>170</sup>

Often, the *kenosis* is presented as a two stage path: Paul first let go of his former Jewish privileges, and in a second step he willingly embraces suffering and death.<sup>171</sup> This mirrors exactly the two step descent of the Christ poem. Wright goes as far as to suggest coded language in chapter 3: Paul talks about his renunciation of Jewish privilege and calls the Philippians to imitation. Because they cannot follow him in

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<sup>166</sup> Perkins, ‘Theology’, 92.

<sup>167</sup> Oakes, *People*, 119.

<sup>168</sup> William Kurz has pioneered this understanding, cf. W.S. Kurz, ‘Kenotic Imitation of Paul and of Christ in Philippians 2 and 3’ in Segovia, F.F., ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 103-126. Also cf. de Vos: “Paul... presents himself as a model for the renunciation of status for the sake of the gospel in his rejection of his Jewish status in 3:2-11. Indeed, in this passage Paul parallels Christ’s renunciation of his status in the ‘hymn’.” (de Vos, *Community*, 284, no. 175). For Oakes, this structure is key for the entire letter (cf. Oakes, *People*, xiii). A similar proposal is given by Brian Dodd, ‘The Story of Christ and the Imitation of Paul in Philippians 2-3’, in Martin-Dodd, eds., *Christology*, 154-161.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Perkins: “...conversion implies an ‘emptying’ analogous to that of Christ” (Perkins, ‘Theology’, 94). Cotter assumes that, “Paul shows that he too left the life of prestige and honour as a scrupulous observer of the Law.” (W. Cotter, ‘Our *Politeuma* is in Heaven: The Meaning of Philippians 3.17-21’ in McLean, *Origins*, 92-104 [ 97]).

<sup>170</sup> Kurz thinks Paul “...reverses his value judgments...” (Kurz, ‘Imitation’, 114), but at the same time “made a kenotic choice” like Christ. Both choices “are held up for imitation” (Kurz, ‘Imitation’, 115).

<sup>171</sup> Perkins talks about “Paul’s own shift from privilege to the abandonment of all that he held valuable and then to imprisonment and suffering” (Perkins, ‘Theology’, 94). Similarly, Paul Minear, who admits that there are differences between the two *status quo ante* of the two servants (Jesus and Paul), states that “...there remained a significant correlation of direction, a downward movement from the highest conceivable status toward total voluntary deprivation, a *tapeinosis* (2:8; 3:21)” (Minear, ‘Singing’, 206).

giving up Jewish privileges they would understand that they have to renounce pagan privilege.<sup>172</sup> De Vos suggests that the Philippian Christians have to forego their citizenship and become like slaves.<sup>173</sup>

Renouncing Roman status, then, is seen as the dominating theme. The talk about people who see themselves as τέλειοι (3:15) and who worship their κοιλία (3:19) seem to make good sense in that reading.

To sum up what I have described so far: Suffering, and the avoidance of suffering, is often seen as the problem underlying chapter 3. Some authors, furthermore, see the Philippian Christians as opting for ways of minimizing conflict and suffering. Others suggest that they proudly cling to their privileges, and/or follow their Roman and pagan values. In some views, this status-consciousness must be read in the light of an implicit, but very clear, contrast between Caesar and Christ at the end of the chapter: Paul has to intervene by calling the Philippian Christians towards undiminished loyalty to Christ over against Caesar or to the values which contrast with those of Caesar.

Before I offer my own reading, two critical remarks are needed:

### 5.3.3 Critique

#### a) From specific to general

We have already commented upon the historical proposals underlying these readings in the introduction. In general more restraint is needed. To suggest an oath of loyalty or to assume widespread citizenship is not backed up by historical or archaeological evidence.

More importantly, some proposals make good sense only because Paul uses very broad terms: τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονεῖν (3:19) is a spacious drawer indeed, which can

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<sup>172</sup> Paul tells them that "...as I, Paul, have rethought my Jewish allegiance in the light of the crucified and risen Jesus, so you should rethink your Roman allegiance in the same light" (Wright, 'Paul's Gospel', 178).

<sup>173</sup> Paul's argument is "...tantamount to a complete rejection of their [the Philippians'] rights and status as Roman citizens." The Philippian Christians who are Roman citizens are "...to renounce their citizenship and consider themselves as slaves-without-privileges within the realm of the Roman Empire" (de Vos, *Community*, 286). For Wright this is not about abandoning citizenship but a warning "...not to compromise their allegiance to Jesus" (Wright, 'Paul's Gospel', 179).

accommodate objects of many sizes and shapes.<sup>174</sup>

On the other hand, the brief discussion about circumcision is very precise and concrete. There is no doubt that Paul later generalizes the theme.<sup>175</sup> Still, it is clear that Paul, at this stage, warns the Philippians very concretely not to get circumcised, which is (*contra* Wright) a real option for the male church members and does not just give them a paradigm to be transposed into a pagan key. Though it is true that the Philippians cannot imitate Paul in forsaking Jewish credentials, he precisely lists them in order to persuade them not to be circumcised.<sup>176</sup> To use a metaphor, he expresses his consternation as to why on earth they would pay a meagre first instalment into an account which he has closed down altogether, though it contained a fortune. The Philippians can and should imitate Paul's *attitude* towards these privileges.<sup>177</sup> Though the specific can always be broadened and the general can be concretized, I think it appropriate to read the specific as specific and the general as general first, not the other way round, along the lines of Philippians 3 itself. The Judaizers are not just a cipher for something else and it is wrong to suggest that Paul is not really interested in these issues.<sup>178</sup> To propose a code on the other hand seems to be unnecessary and unwarranted.

## b) Kenosis?

While I can see the elements of Hooker's proposed interchange (2:6-8; 3:10; 3:21) there is something going on on a different level from a two-stage-kenosis when Paul re-evaluates his formerly treasured identity markers in 3:2-11. From the outside, Paul's story certainly includes an element of letting go and giving up, though it could be argued that he still owns circumcision, his origins and the knowledge of the

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Peter Oakes' very valid warning in a different context not to sell broadly possible scenarios as a close historical fit, in P. Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*, (SPCK: London, 2009), 74.

<sup>175</sup> Darell Doughty rightly points out that the specific becomes paradigmatic: "Paul's rejection of 'righteousness based on law' becomes paradigmatic for the renunciation of all things worldly" (D. J. Doughty, 'Citizens of Heaven: Philippians 3.2-21' in *NTS* 41 [1995], 102-122 [114]).

<sup>176</sup> *Contra* Wright, who sees in v. 17 the proof that the Philippian Christians had to transpose the warnings against Judaizers into their own pagan key (cf. Wright, 'Paul's Gospel', 175). If the verse refers back at all to the first section of the chapter, it is still possible for the Philippians to imitate Paul in his attitude and draw the right conclusions from it.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Kurz: "This imitation focused especially on central attitudes of the Christian message, not on peculiarities of Paul's life." (Kurz, 'Imitation', 108).

<sup>178</sup> *Contra* de Vos: "...the real issue in Phil 3:2-11 does not appear to be circumcision and the Law" (de Vos, *Community*, 269). The brevity of Paul's argument does not change the fact that the important catchwords of the Galatian argument are all there (δικαιοσύνη, νόμος, πίστις, σάρξ...).

Law.<sup>179</sup> But the central aspect of this passage is not that Paul lets go – perhaps with considerable heartache – of what is dear and valuable to him, in order to obediently fulfil God’s mission.<sup>180</sup> Instead, Paul re-evaluates his formerly most precious possessions “not just [as] worthless but positively detrimental and repulsive”.<sup>181</sup> This is not the language of patient suffering, but of quite violent distancing. There surely is an element of the former gains paling in the light of the latter (το ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως), but this is not the main point.<sup>182</sup> Paul has lost his former treasures, not because he willingly gave them up but because the earthquake of his encounter with Christ left them in shambles. Even what he still owns – circumcision, his origins, his knowledge of the law – means nothing to him anymore.<sup>183</sup> Here, the parallel to Christ’s *kenosis* breaks down. However attractive, and not without force at first sight, Paul is not embarking on the same twofold downward spiral as Jesus, letting go his privileges first (in correspondence to 2:6-7) and secondly accepting suffering and death (cf. 2:8).

It is more appropriate to see Paul talk about two incommensurable spiritual patterns (my own righteousness-the righteousness of God, v.9),<sup>184</sup> not about strategies of how to avoid or embrace suffering or about renouncing status.

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<sup>179</sup> Pace Bloomquist: “In giving up his [Paul’s] ascribed honor, the honor of being born as a Jew of the royal pre-Davidic line of Israel (that of Saul)... Paul had suffered immensely” (Bloomquist, ‘Subverted’, 278).

<sup>180</sup> *Contra* Stowers: “Paul truly had great benefits in his life as a faithful Jew but surrendered that life in order to be faithful to his call to be an apostle to the Gentiles” (Stowers, ‘Friends’, 120).

<sup>181</sup> Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 207. Bockmuehl very helpfully points out the financial imagery: “Paul’s wholesale rejection applies not to the qualities and achievements listed, but to the *value* he has attached to them... A luxury tour bus may be a vital asset to a tour operator; for an aircraft manufacturer, however, it is likely to be a non-performing investment to be written off... the value of assets is always assessed in the light of business objectives.” (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 204). In the terminology of the French sociologist Pierre Bordieu we might say that Paul has re-evaluated his symbolic capital (P. Bordieu, tr. Richard Nice, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 16; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 171-183).

<sup>182</sup> Pace Ascough: “Paul was able to have a net gain far surpassing the value of his former achievements...” or “Paul’s former achievements are not ‘refuse’ in and of themselves, they are ‘refuse’ in comparison with what Paul now has” (Ascough, *Associations*, 120). Paul does not contrast the good with the better (as e.g. in 1 Cor 7) but tells us that gain became loss.

<sup>183</sup> Pace Wright, who stresses that Paul did not “...regard covenant membership itself as unimportant or to be jettisoned.” Instead he “did not regard his covenant membership in Israel as something to be exploited. It did not entitle him to adopt a position of effortless superiority over the lesser breeds without the law” (Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 177). This is not the issue here. Bockmuehl rightly points out that Paul has other things to say about Judaism elsewhere (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 184). But here the evaluation is plainly negative, to be sure, not in an absolute sense but always correlated and contrasted with ‘knowing Christ.’

<sup>184</sup> “different models of justification” (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 213).

In the light of Christ (διὰ τὸν Χριστόν, 3:7), Paul cannot help discarding what was precious to him. At the same time, he *must* discard it all, in order to win Christ (ἵνα Χριστόν κερδήσω, 3:8). Re-evaluating Jewish status and identity is thus not part of obediently sharing the lowliness and subsequent suffering of Christ. Instead it is the precondition<sup>185</sup> for tasting both the sufferings *and* the glory of Christ.<sup>186</sup> If Paul sows to his flesh, to speak in Galatian terminology (Gal 6:8), he can reap neither the power of Christ's resurrection nor the communion of Christ's sufferings. Considering gains as loss because of and for the sake of knowing Christ is not quite the same as sharing in Christ's humbling in order to share in his exaltation.<sup>187</sup> The initial earthquake is followed by a pattern of conformity with Christ but this must not be confused with the former.<sup>188</sup>

### 5.3.4 Re-Reading Philippians 3

What then is Philippians 3 about? Is there a thread, a common theme running through? It seems to me that the chapter is often treated as a bag of puzzle pieces waiting to be put together. The search goes for a historical scenario which can serve as 'Vorlage' and help us to make sense of this passage of the letter. More often than not, the pieces are then bent and cut to fit the 'Vorlage.' I suggest that we treat the individual pieces more cautiously and to let them have their shape.

In the following I offer a close reading of Philippians 3 that pays attention to the character and dynamic of the text as it stands. I have found that the chapter unfolds through a variety of contrasts, which I list below:<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> This must not be taken in a strictly chronological sense. Christ is the primary fact and, in a sense, causes the renunciation, just as the renunciation is essential in order to know Christ.

<sup>186</sup> The point is not just about "Paul's letting go of his own Jewish prerogatives in hope of being exalted in the resurrection..." (*Pace Kurz*, 'Imitation', 105 and similarly *ibid.*, 108).

<sup>187</sup> Peter Oakes senses this by admitting that, "...Paul... models loss for the sake of gaining Christ, rather than loss for the sake of others" but concludes that "...the practical consequences of following this model in Philippi are likely to be loss for the sake of others" (Oakes, *People*, 119).

<sup>188</sup> Paul's notions of 'death and life' and 'suffering and glory' are certainly very complex and cannot all be traced here, though it would be very interesting to study the connection between the initial radical shattering of identity markers and subsequent patterns of suffering for and with Christ.

<sup>189</sup> I am encouraged to see that Fee (*Philippians*, 312-313) and O'Brien, (*Philippians*, 394, 419) try to do something similar for parts of chapter 3. My own chart tries to work out the contrasts more clearly for the entire chapter.

Contrasts:

2: Beware **mutilation (a)**

3: *We* (ἡμεῖς γάρ) are **circumcision (a')**

serving in **spirit (b')**, boasting in Christ  
Jesus

3b: Not (οὐκ) trusting in the **flesh (b)**

3b-4: Not (οὐκ) trusting in the **flesh (c)**

7/8: (ἀλλά)\* Seeing **gain as loss (c')**

(though I could, 4-6)

because (διὰ) of Christ

8: For the sake of (διὰ) the surpassing  
knowledge

8c-9: In order (ἵνα) to win Christ and be  
found in him

9: Not (μὴ) having **my own**

But (ἀλλά) having the **righteousness of  
God**

**righteousness (d)**

**(d')**

10-11: In order to know Christ  
and the power of his resurrection (d1),  
and fellowship of suffering (d1')  
conformed to his death (d1') which leads to  
resurrection (d1)

12: I have not **taken hold** of it yet (**e**)

12: But (δέ) I **press on (e')** to take hold

(οὐχ...ἤδη)

in as much as I have been taken hold by

Christ

nor am I perfect yet



13a: *I* do not (οὐ) think I have

**taken hold (f)**

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**18:** Many walk (γάρ) as **enemies of cross (g')**

19: Their goal destruction

Their belly their god

Their **honour** in their **shame (g1/g1')**

Thinking **earthly** things (**h**)

13: But one thing: (ἐν δέ) I am **pressing on (f')**

towards the goal

13b: forgetting **behind (f1)**

Straining towards what is **ahead (f1')**-

14b: towards the prize of the *heavenward*

call.

15: (The perfect ones know this)

16: Live up to what has been already  
attained

17: Imitate me! Watch **us as good models (g)**

20: But *our* (ἡμῶν γάρ) government in  
**heaven (h')**

From where we expect a saviour, Lord  
Jesus Christ

the **humble body (h1)**

will be transformed into **body of glory (h1')**

through his great power

\* The first ἀλλά in v. 7 is not as clearly attested by textual witnesses as the one in v. 8, where Paul repeats the phrase

These contrasts lead the way to a discovery of a shared undercurrent throughout the chapter. A variety of themes unfolds, with one theme slowly evolving out of the other “anticipating later themes while echoing and repeating present themes.”<sup>190</sup>

What holds them together is this joint undercurrent, which could perhaps be seen as a stick in a mobile, from which different pieces hang.

I would like to unfold this undercurrent from three angles: Eccentric identity, dynamic striving, and heavenward focus

#### **a) Eccentric Identity**

Paul starts off with a severe warning against Jewish circumcision, as we have seen. The initial theme of περιτομή or the degrading κατατομή (vv. 2-3) is characterized as trusting in the flesh, and contrasted with service in the spirit (v. 3) and boasting in Christ (v. 3). This concrete problem is then broadened into a discussion about a variety of Jewish identity markers (vv. 4-6). As we have seen Paul discarded and radically re-evaluated his former gains, both because of (causal), and for the sake of (final), Christ (vv. 7-9).

The initial catchword, περιτομή is dropped from v. 6 on. Σάρξ makes no appearance after v. 4. It almost looks as if the very specific ‘Jewish’ vocabulary has been replaced by the general expressions πάντα and τὰ πάντα (v. 8).<sup>191</sup> However, the νόμος is there to stay until v. 9, which indicates that Paul is still concerned with the concrete problem of those who promote circumcision. Paul presents the issue as one of incommensurate patterns of δικαιοσύνη (9). From v. 10 on, all vocabulary from the initial problem has vanished and Paul unfolds the expression of γνῶσις instead, the central term of the next section, which was already introduced in v. 8.<sup>192</sup> From

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<sup>190</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 313. Fee captures the development of the chapter very well through his sub-headings “There is no Future to the Past”; “The Future lies with the Present- Knowing Christ” and “The Future lies with the Future-Attaining Christ” (ibid., 285-384) though he unfortunately does not include Phil 3:15-21 in this structure.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. Doughty, ‘Citizens’, 111.

<sup>192</sup> *Contra* de Vos there is no “abrupt shift from the Law in 3:9 to the issue of suffering in 3:10” at all (de Vos, *Community*, 269).

these few and angry lines it is hard to say what it is exactly that makes circumcision so problematic for Paul. There is however a prevailing sense of becoming unsettled in this chapter. Trusting in one's own resources or identities will preclude knowing Christ. Knowing Christ uproots previous identities. The new identity of 'being found in Christ' (v. 9) obviously cannot be owned like the old one. What is *ὀπίσω* is best forgotten (v. 13),<sup>193</sup> what is *ἐμπροσθεν* on the other hand, cannot just be calmly enjoyed but Paul must stretch out (*ἐπεκτεινόμενος*) to reach it. The being 'in Christ' is characterized as a potential that calls for further realization rather than a state. Elements of assurance and uncertainty walk hand in hand: in his artfully chiasmic statement of being united with Christ in v. 10 (knowing the power of his resurrection – sharing in his sufferings – being conformed to his death – attaining resurrection from the dead), Paul confidently mentions the power of Christ's resurrection first but proceeds to express his hope rather tentatively that he will *εἰ πῶς* (v. 11) attain the resurrection from the dead.<sup>194</sup>

All this<sup>195</sup> Paul has not yet taken hold of (*ἔλαβον*, v. 12), but he pursues it as well as he can because he has been taken hold of (*κατελήμφθην*) by Christ. Paul strongly advocates an ec-centric, uprooted identity that is tilted over and permanently in the making.

A fascinating image by Wittgenstein (who does not interpret Philippians or Paul) may further illustrate that. He describes a man, who rests his weight on earth and another one who is suspended from heaven:

Das [holding on to faith] kann also nur geschehen, wenn Du dich nicht mehr auf die Erde stüttest, sondern am Himmel hängst. Dann ist alles anders und es ist 'kein Wunder', wenn Du dann kannst, was Du jetzt nicht kannst.  
(Anzusehen ist freylich der Hängende wie der Stehende, aber das Kräftespiel

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<sup>193</sup> *Ἐπιλανθάνομενος* can also be translated as 'paying no attention to' (Fee, *Philippians*, 347).

<sup>194</sup> Some scholars take the unique expression *ἐξανάστασις* as an indication that Paul fights a spiritualistic group which "thinks of the resurrection as already achieved" and that "they already have eschatological gifts" (Koester, 'Purpose', 323 - 324). The link to the previous section is made by assuming that this group held a "perfectionist doctrine of Law" (ibid., 331), which made them believe that they had reached spiritual fulfilment. I find it hard to see how fulfilment of the law and emphasis on circumcision might lead to the idea that there is no future resurrection.

<sup>195</sup> It seems to be most natural to take the phrase 'I have not yet taken hold of' as referring back to *τοῦ γινῶναι αὐτόν*, though a few textual witnesses put it in parallel with *δικαιοσύνη*.

in ihm ist ja ein ganz anderes und er kann daher ganz anderes tun, als der Stehende).<sup>196</sup>

Paul's first concern in Philippians 3 is to bring the Philippian Christians into this eccentric identity which lets them be suspended from heaven. Circumcision is rejected as a practice, which would bring the Philippians back on their feet so to speak.

#### **b) Dynamic striving**

Paul goes on in vv. 12-16 to emphasize this uprooted existence as something highly dynamic. There can be no standing still in the Christian existence but there has to be a constant and vigorous pressing on.<sup>197</sup> Chapter 3 is characterized by a very dynamic piety that looks upward and onward. This is in keeping with the overall tone of the letter. For Paul, it will not do to preserve the status quo, to hold on to what has been achieved and faithfully preserve it (though this aspect is not absent – *στήκετε* twice: 1:27 and 4:1; cf. also 3:16). Throughout the letter, expressions of fulfilment, growth, increase and perfection are not infrequent (cf. 1:9; 1:14, 26; 4:7; 4:12, 17, 18).

Similarly, Paul emphasizes that he has not reached the goal yet, but he is pressing on (3:12).<sup>198</sup> To be 'perfect' is precisely to know about this dynamic, as Paul wryly puts it in 3:15.<sup>199</sup> If Paul really combats a perfectionist group, he certainly does not present a calm assurance of salvation or a quietist piety as the alternative.<sup>200</sup> If perfectionism is targeted, it is targeted as the attitude which self-complacently stops

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<sup>196</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 33 (the volume contains texts in English and German).

<sup>197</sup> "Christians *are* in Christ, but they in turn must also be 'found' in him on the day of Christ" (Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 209).

<sup>198</sup> The image is from the world of athletes. Even if this reminded the Philippians "...of the games staged to honor members of the imperial family" (Perkins, 'Theology', 100) it is doubtful that the imperial cult is once more recalled, as Perkins claims (*ibid.*, 100).

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 355. Paul may well make a critical remark towards certain people who take pride in being *τελείοι* though the tone is not highly polemical. Similarly the term *ἀποκαλύψει* could deal with people who think very highly about their revelations. Still, portraits of Gnostics who are obsessed with heavenly things, are moral libertinists and deny suffering and death require excessive speculation from the textual evidence (Cf. e.g. Koester, 'Purpose').

<sup>200</sup> Paul is "...more likely to be addressing a problem of Christian inertia..." (Oakes, *People*, 120).

striving for ‘the things above’, and much less as an attitude which is boastful of heavenly things or denies suffering.<sup>201</sup>

These dynamics of striving towards a goal and growing towards fulfilment are easily overlooked and downplayed in accounts of Philippians which see the letter merely as a rallying call to resistance and endurance over against hostile opponents. The language of defiance and renunciation sits awkwardly with this general tone of running and pressing on.

### c) Heavenly focus

The Philippians – like Paul – must not settle for a stable identity, they are to strive forward towards the goal. But what is the direction of all this striving? In v. 14, Paul explicitly talks about the σκοπός. In the same verse he mentions the ἄνω κλήσις. Paul, then, is pressing on towards this heavenly goal. We have already seen in the previous sections that Paul’s striving is towards ‘being found in Christ’. This includes reevaluating symbols of status and identity. It also includes suffering and dying with and like Christ, but also experiencing the power of Christ’s resurrection. And it includes constant striving onwards. Paul admonishes the Philippians to be his co-imitators in all this (v. 15). Moreover, they are to imitate not only him, but in general, good role models (v. 17, where σκοπεῖν language turns up again).

Paul similarly draws attention to people who are no role-models at all because they have set their minds on τὰ ἐπίγεια (vv. 18-19). But ours, says Paul in an emphatic conclusion, is a heavenly focus, ours is the πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς (v. 20). But what does it mean to have a heavenly focus?

Andrew Lincoln has shown convincingly that Paul uses ‘heaven’ to talk about realized eschatology.<sup>202</sup> It is the space where “the benefits of salvation awaited at the

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<sup>201</sup> Doughty rightly remarks that there is “no intrinsic connection between claims of spiritual fulfilment and the denial of suffering and death” (Doughty, ‘Citizens’, 112).

<sup>202</sup> “What is to be revealed at the end can be thought of as already existing and it is when his emphasis is on realized eschatology that the apostle exchanges temporal categories for spatial” (Lincoln, *Paradise*, 22).

end are already present...<sup>203</sup> Heaven is where Christ is at present. It is “the place where Christ rules as Lord from God’s right hand.”<sup>204</sup>

In that sense, the heavenly focus is in keeping with the wider letter, which has a strong orientation towards the *future horizon of consummation*.<sup>205</sup> Paul uses the expression ‘day of Christ’ three times in 1:6; 1:11 and 2:16. In addition we catch a glimpse of this ultimate horizon in 2:9-11 and 3:20 and 21. The day of Christ might bring Paul’s highest aspirations to fulfilment; the Philippians might indeed be his χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός (4:1) and bring about his final καύχημα (2:16), but it can also reveal – God forbid – that Paul has laboured for nothing and run in vain (2:16).<sup>206</sup> Looking forward to this ultimate horizon the believers are also looking upward, where Christ has already realized what will ultimately be true for all. This Christ-reality is the defining vantage point for the present. All moments of outward looking (like resisting heresies, standing firm in the face of opposition) and inward looking (living harmoniously and lovingly) are under the pull of this ‘upward call’ (3:14).

This is reinforced by the translation of πολίτευμα as ‘government’ or ‘constitution’, following Boettger’s careful analysis.<sup>207</sup> This is to be preferred to traditional renderings of ‘homeland’ or ‘citizenship’.<sup>208</sup> On balance, I also prefer it to the suggestion that we translate it as ‘voluntary associaton’.<sup>209</sup> The meaning of ‘colony’ is also possible. This has provoked the association that Paul sees the Philippian

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<sup>203</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise*, 101.

<sup>204</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise*, 101.

<sup>205</sup> “...the constant eschatological perspective throughout the letter...” (Kurz, ‘Imitation’, 112).

<sup>206</sup> Fee stresses this eschatological horizon more than other scholars, but sees it foremost as the ground of reassurance (cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 50-52). What is underemphasized is the element of spiritual anxiety this horizon causes.

<sup>207</sup> Boettger states that πολίτευμα has active, dynamic connotations, similar to βασιλεία. It can mean a variety of things: political actions, the subjects of political actions or even constitution. *Res publica* and *civitas* would be corresponding Latin terms (P.C. Boettger, ‘Die eschatologische Existenz der Christen: Erwägungen zu Philipper 3.20’, *ZNW* 60 [1969], 244-263 [250]). Cf. the similar conclusions of Lincoln, *Paradise*, 98-101. πολίτευμα must be understood “as reign rather than realm” and as a state’s “constitutive force regulating its citizens” (ibid., 99).

<sup>208</sup> Cf. the list in Boettger, ‘Existenz’, 263. The traditional ideas are prefigured by Philo and picked up in Christian writings such as Hebrews 11:13-15 or the Letter of Diognetus, though these authors use πατρίς, not πολίτευμα. For Philo, cf. *Conf.* 78 (Philo uses the verb πολιτεύομαι in the same sentence). For post-Pauline era, cf. *Diogn.* 5.5 (M.W. Holmes, ed. and tr., *The Apostolic Fathers*, [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2007]).

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Cotter and Ascough who see Paul as targeting the widespread immorality and φιλοτιμία of these groups (Ascough, *Associations*, 144, 146; Cotter, ‘Politeuma’, esp. 99-101). This may tie in well with the vices mentioned in 3:19. However, in this case we would expect Paul to say that “we are not a *politeuma* like other *politeumata*” and not to point to heaven.

church as a colonial outpost of Christ, which looks to its heavenly mother-country for help.<sup>210</sup> Over against this attractive thought, Boettger cautions that “*politeuma* in der Bedeutung ‘der einer Kolonie entsprechende Heimatstaat’ nicht belegt [ist].”<sup>211</sup> To translate the *heavenly politeuma* as ‘colony’ does not make much sense. It is furthermore not stated that the church in Philippi *is* the heavenly *politeuma* but that it *has* a heavenly *politeuma*.<sup>212</sup>

However, if we translate πολίτευμα as “the primary binding and governing relationship”, we might put heaven in parallel with Rome, the Philippian colonialists’ “state and constitutive government” whose rules must be practised and embodied in Philippi.<sup>213</sup>

The Philippian believers then, though they cannot be said to *be* the heavenly πολίτευμα, can still walk as its citizens, as Phil 1:27 suggests.<sup>214</sup> They are already seen under its sway and command.<sup>215</sup>

So far, I hope to have shown that Paul teaches the church in Philippi an important lesson in Christian spirituality: They have to agree to the unsettling identity in Christ which is always in the making, and as one concrete consequence they are not to seek circumcision, though there are certainly many other ways of spelling this out. Related to this, is an appeal to a dynamic existence that never stands still but presses on and reaches out to get hold of the Christ reality more fully. This Christ reality is, at the same time, the defining present that has taken hold of them, but also the future

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<sup>210</sup> E.g. Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 173.

<sup>211</sup> Boettger, ‘Existenz’, 245. Cf. also Lincoln, *Paradise*, 100 and Koester, ‘Purpose’, 330 no. 1.

<sup>212</sup> There is a similar structure in Gal 4:26 where the ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ is called μήτηρ ἡμῶν. It is the defining reality for the church, but the church is not fully identified with it (cf. also Lincoln, *Paradise*, 21 and Boettger, ‘Existenz’, 256).

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Lincoln, *Paradise*, 100.

<sup>214</sup> Lincoln stresses the political connotations of πολιτεύεσθαι. He rightly points out that Paul must have his reasons for using this term rather than the synonyms in περιπατεῖν or ζῆν in 1:27 (Lincoln, *Paradise*, 101). E.C. Miller points out that the phrase πολιτεύεσθε is a very important term in Hellenistic Judaism which is used “when conduct relative to some law of life – political, moral, social, or religious – is signified” (E.C. Miller, ‘Πολιτεύεσθε in Philippians 1.27: Some Philological and Thematic Observations’, *JSNT* 15 [1982], 86-96 [87]) and suggests that Paul makes a deliberate transition from ‘living according to Tora’ to ‘living according to the gospel/Christ’ by using it (ibid., 91).

<sup>215</sup> The πολίτευμα “ist jetzt schon die eschatologische Existenz bestimmende Macht” (Boettger, ‘Existenz’, 258).

horizon and the heavenly focus of the Philippian believers.<sup>216</sup> They are to see themselves as governed and pulled onward by this heavenly reality.

In my reading I want to suggest an *alternative socio-political reading*. Paul clearly calls the Philippian church to be a ‘community under authority’. Christ’s authority generates a tangible social reality. But what is it exactly that the Philippian believers are to embody? And is this ‘community under authority’ not, by default, set up as an alternative community that resists Graeco-Roman values and challenges the authority of the emperor?

In the following sections I am going to explore the two aspects of Christ’s Lordship as normative and saving. But first, another brief discussion about Imperial language is inevitable.

### 5.3.5 The Community under Authority

In this section I will show that Paul uses his political vocabulary in order to talk about the church as a distinctive body under Christ’s authority. We will see that there is a figure of thought very close to O’Donovan’s: The church is a community under authority. Paul also very strongly emphasizes Yoder’s concern that the church is a community in conformity to its Lord. While O’Donovan explicitly assumes and Yoder more tacitly confirms that the church is not a fully politicized community, Paul does not talk about this issue. The church is not contrasted with other political societies as the true political body to replace all others. On the other hand the church is painted as a very distinctive body with an altogether different focus from the rest of the world, as Yoder would have it, too.

Philippians 3:20 again uses powerful images from the political world to describe Christ’s coming in glory: from the centre of power comes a majestic figure with the capacity to save from all perils.<sup>217</sup> Political and religious imagery fuse in this image.

Christ is painted in colours of great majesty and power: he will have ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα (3:21). Like in the Christ poem, we

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<sup>216</sup> “Christ is both the means and the end of God’s call” (Fee, *Philippians*, 350).

<sup>217</sup> Oakes is right to say that “...the link between saving and power was a central element in Roman Imperial ideology” (Oakes, *People*, 141) but I think this connection is far more widespread.



might have here overtones of LXX language and related connotations of exclusiveness.<sup>218</sup> Unlike in the Christ poem, Christ, not God, is the very active subject here. After the rather static image of homage of Phil 2:9-11, Phil 3:20 and 21 paint a much more dynamic and energetic picture. Oakes is probably right in stating that “in the first century AD, the one whom most people would see as saving in accordance with his power to subject all things to himself was the Emperor.”<sup>219</sup> But just like in the Christ poem, we do not know whether this imagery is primarily used as a tentative analogy or whether it is rather consciously using the Roman emperor as the dark foil. There can be no doubt that Christ’s authority is again described as the highest, unsurpassable, ultimate authority. Christ is depicted as the factual head and Lord of all reality, τὰ πάντα, under whom everything is subjected or, perhaps rather, ordered and kept in place.<sup>220</sup> It is a scene of sovereign power, which nevertheless does not emphasize the conquest or destruction of enemies.<sup>221</sup> The latter element is somewhat more feasible in 1 Cor 15:24-27 where Paul mentions ἐχθροί which Christ will καταργεῖν, something between invalidation and destruction.<sup>222</sup> Like in the Christ poem the comprehensive expression τὰ πάντα (3:21) transcends any friend-enemy dichotomy.<sup>223</sup> Just like in the Christ poem it is vital to see that this is a tale about one ‘emperor’, not two. Christ has no enemy, no opponent, nobody who tries to imitate, parody or fight him as various beasts in various apocalypses do (Dan 7; Rev 12; 13; 17). Within that brief scene, nobody is singled out or confronted.<sup>224</sup> While the emperor has certainly no specific agency in this scene of Christ’s arrival, there is the possibility and potential that Christ’s Lordship is *implicitly* juxtaposed and contrasted with the emperor. The potential of the metaphor makes such a reading

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<sup>218</sup> Ἐγὼ ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος ὅμοιος μου (Isa 43:11).

<sup>219</sup> Oakes, *People*, 145.

<sup>220</sup> Πάντα and ὑποτάσσω are used in the LXX version of Psalm 8:7. The latter verse is more fully quoted in 1 Cor 15:27 and interpreted christologically. If we have an echo of Psalm 8, the emphasis might be more on an ordering and even caring activity.

<sup>221</sup> Oakes suggests that “the reference to Christ’s subjection of all things” points to the “presence of threatening forces...” (Oakes, *People*, 83). This is admittedly so, but the element of victorious conquest is not dwelled upon.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 51-52.

<sup>223</sup> *Contra* Stowers who likes to see patterns of friends and enemies throughout the letter, e.g. Stowers, ‘Friends’, 120.

<sup>224</sup> *Contra* Wright: “...the time will come when Caesar and all who follow and worship him will be humbled before the throne of the true Lord of the World” (Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 180).

possible. But again we have to ask whether we have any pointers in the textual *context* of this image that strengthen the case for such a reading.

It is certainly noteworthy that there are no emphatic statements about the one or true Lord. The phrase ‘lord and saviour’ could surely be sharpened up polemically by talking about *the* saviour or emphatically naming Jesus Christ as the *Lord and Saviour*. This is not the case. Σωτήρ is a qualifying noun for the well-known formula κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός.<sup>225</sup>

There is no call for loyalty over against one major competitor. The language of conflict is confined to those who walk as enemies of the cross, which are most likely inner-Christian opponents and not hostile outsiders.<sup>226</sup> As we have already seen, there are not two commonwealths or governments contrasted but two foci: one that ponders earthly things, and one that looks to the heavenly government.<sup>227</sup>

Issues of idolatry, otherwise important for Paul (Rom 1:23-25; 1 Cor 8; 1 Thess 1:9), are completely absent from this passage, as from Philippians in general. All this is very striking and does make us cautious to postulate a combative reading of this section along the lines of “Jesus was the reality, Caesar the parody.”<sup>228</sup> My reading does not, of course, prove that the Imperial cult was not strong in Philippi. But if the Imperial cult is a dominant feature of the historical background then Paul’s response is all the more remarkable for not even alluding to it.

But if Paul does not use these stunning images in order to discourage political allegiance to Rome or denounce Imperial worship, what are they there for?

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<sup>225</sup> It is, of course, possible to explain σωτήρ from other sources than Imperial propaganda. Ascough suggests that σωτήρ could bring up associations with gods in Philippian minds, especially the Thracian horseman. The latter was connected with hope of after-life. “Although Paul’s use of the epithet Saviour arguably derived from his knowledge of the LXX, among persons familiar with the use of this ascription for deities worshipped in associations it would have been rhetorically effective in a different way” (Ascough, *Associations*, 160). Oakes, though ultimately arguing for a political understanding of the metaphor rightly points out that “on its own, the title σωτήρ would be far from unequivocal in pointing towards the Emperor” (Oakes, *People*, 138-139).

<sup>226</sup> The “enemies of the cross of Christ” are said to be destined for ἀπώλεια (3:19). This expression can admittedly include disobedient Christians as well as hostile outsiders (cf. 1:28), though it is more likely that Paul sheds tears (3:18) for wayward insiders than for hostile outsiders (cf. e.g. Fowl, *Philippians*, 170). For a colourful list of possible candidates cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 453.

<sup>227</sup> Fee, who very sharply and clearly works out the contrasting function of the ‘enemies of the cross’ as earthly minded people (e.g. Fee, *Philippians*, 357, 363) strangely still sees the emperor and Roman citizenship as targets of the imagery in v. 20. (ibid., 375-384).

<sup>228</sup> Wright, ‘Paul’s Gospel’, 174.

They are firstly there to urge conformity.

### 5.3.5.1 The Community Called to Conformity

By using political vocabulary, Paul very strongly underlines that the Philippian believers are called to a very specific behaviour, as we have seen.<sup>229</sup> Just as he called them to conform to the ‘attitude that was in Christ Jesus’ in 2:4, he now calls them to emulate corporately the ethos of their heavenly government. They have to take their cue in all matters from this heavenly ‘constitution’. It is not completely unproblematic to work out the material side of this behavioural code or constitution. We are not told what the exemplary people of v. 17 do to make them qualify as good role models. And the invectives hurled at the ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ have proved to be fertile grounds for exegetical guesswork, but without a clear consensus emerging.<sup>230</sup> I suggest taking ‘cross of Christ’ as shorthand for ‘all that Christ stood for in his humiliation’.<sup>231</sup> The thought of conformity is alluded to in 3:10 and brought to conclusion in 3:20. It is probably fair to say that what first comes to mind are attitudes of humility and regard for others, when Christ is recalled as paradigm and when the Christ poem is echoed. Within this paradigm there is also willingness to suffer and the willingness to keep up the good struggle despite the suffering that is likely to follow. However, it is rash to read any *ταπειν\** vocabulary as ‘suffering’. The former has a semantic field of its own and indicates new ways of relating to others, not primarily gestures of self-inflicted pain and renunciation.<sup>232</sup> Even where suffering is in the picture, the *avoidance* of suffering is not a prominent theme in Philippians in my view. Paul’s tone is on encouragement: suffering will not break the

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<sup>229</sup> “[Paul] is speaking of a community whose character and common life are defined by the lordship of Christ” (Fowl, *Philippians*, 18). It does *not* follow though that “‘in Christ’ and ‘in Philippi’ can be read as setting up the two political realms vying for the allegiance of the Philippian Christians...” (*contra* Fowl, *ibid.*, 19).

<sup>230</sup> The expressions of *κοιλία* or *αἰσχύνη* could carry overtones of gluttony or illicit sexual behaviour. Even so this could point to a range of attitudes, from “unbefangenen Paktieren mit der Sünde...” (Boettger, ‘Existenz’, 254) to the preference of worldly pleasures over against the hard evangelistic struggle. Other exegetes want to associate the invectives with the Judaizers’ concern for food laws and circumcision (as discussed and negatively evaluated by Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 231). Also cf. Koester, ‘Purpose’, 326-28 and Kurz, ‘Imitation’, 116. For a thorough discussion of *κοιλία* cf. K.O. Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>231</sup> The earthly minded people “have abandoned a lifestyle marked by the cross” (Fee, *Philippians*, 363).

<sup>232</sup> Pace Oakes who, commenting on Phil 2:12, claims that *σωτηρία* is always linked with suffering: “This way of suffering is, for the Philippians, their route to salvation...” (Oakes, *People*, 108).

union with Christ (1:21-23) and should not keep the Philippians from proclaiming the Gospel (1:28-30).<sup>233</sup>

On the whole, Paul wants the Philippians to embody and display what was embodied by Christ and what will be judged as καρπός (1:11) on the day of Christ.

It is much harder to say what this means in concrete terms. While Paul excludes circumcision on principle, he makes no comparable statement of a categorical warning against being a Roman citizen or seeking wealth or running for political office, though ‘not putting one’s trust in the flesh’ can certainly be adapted to more than one context. Similarly, what it might mean to leave behind the past and to press hard for the heavenly goal is not specified.

In any case it seems to me that it does not do justice to the text to reduce conformity to Christ to gestures of defiance towards the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture or to see admonitions to love and mutual care as mere strategic rallying calls in the face of hostile oppression.<sup>234</sup>

Christ’s government program is not tailor made to attack the emperor or certain Graeco-Roman values. It is as much a navigation tool as an instrument of criticism. Because the ‘community under authority’ takes its cue in everything from Christ and not (negatively) from Graeco-Roman culture or Imperial values, we can expect this community to be engaged in discerning and evaluating activities, not just frozen in a posture of wholesale rejection. Though Paul sees the Philippians in a rather elitist statement as shining stars in the night sky of “a crooked and perverse generation” (2:15), he also calls them to discernment (1:10). They are to ponder the good everywhere (4:8), not to reject Graeco-Roman value systems *in globo*. The Philippians will find good values and practices and bad ones as they look around, perhaps even in the emperor himself.<sup>235</sup> Processes of testing and discerning are not compromising activities but unavoidable in this situation.

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<sup>233</sup> Similarly Oakes: “He [Paul] would not want suffering to stop evangelism” (Oakes, *People*, 114).

<sup>234</sup> *Contra de Vos*: “...the issue of unity is important not in its own right but...due to the context of conflict or ... because they are at war” (De Vos, *Community*, 227, no. 152),

<sup>235</sup> *Pace Fowl* who holds that “Paul proposes a Christian counter-culture”, which the pagan Philippians cannot recognize “without at the same time undermining the foundations of their own imperial culture” (Fowl, *Philippians*, 87).

### 5.3.5.2 The Community Sustained by Hope

Christ is presented in great majesty, but surprisingly, he is not very much depicted as a ruler at all. He seems to use his amazing power for one sole activity: to transform the σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως of the believers into his σῶμα τῆς δόξης. The focus is on the transformation of the very personal, even individual existence of the believer.

If public vindication is what the Philippian Christians yearn for, they must be somewhat disappointed by Paul's vision; if they thirst for justice, and possibly the destruction of those who harassed and oppressed them, they will be quite taken aback by these lines. The emphasis is not on vindication but on transformation. This transformation happens on earth, not in heaven, as has been rightly pointed out.<sup>236</sup> However, we do not quite learn what follows afterwards. The Christians welcome their Lord but no further activity corresponds to the transformation of the body, neither praise and worship nor ruling and judging with Christ.<sup>237</sup>

The glorification which follows is promised to the 'body of humility' (3:21). This expression may just characterize the physical human body in its neediness and fragility under the sway of death.<sup>238</sup> In this reading, the coming saviour transforms the humble, created body into his glorious body because he has overcome death.<sup>239</sup>

But the verses may well hint at a more ethical dimension: the Christ believers who agreed to walk the way of humility and love for others in keeping with their heavenly πολίτευμα are rewarded by glory, while those who walk in an earthly fashion will meet ἀπώλεια. We have already approvingly taken note of Morna Hooker's interchange proposal: Christ, who identified with human nature and human weakness

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<sup>236</sup> "Nirgendwo findet sich bei ihm [Paulus] der Gedanke, dass der wiederkommende Christus die Seinen mit sich in den Himmel zurückholt" (Boettger, *Existenz*, 256).

<sup>237</sup> On this theme, cf. Hanna Roose, 'Sharing in Christ's Rule: Tracing a Debate in Earliest Christianity', *JSNT* 27 (2004), 123-148. Roose shows well how Paul uses the theme of 'eschatological rule of the believers' (referring, e.g. to 1 Cor 6; Romans 5 – 6; 1 Cor 15). The theme, though not unknown in Pauline literature, is not reflected in Philippians 3:20-21.

<sup>238</sup> Concerning 'neediness' cf. Paul's use of ταπεινοῦσθαι in connection with hunger in 4:12. This is a "socio-economic term indicating poverty" (Ascough, *Associations*, 118, no. 31).

<sup>239</sup> The ἐνέργεια τοῦ δύνασθαι (3:21) reminds us of the δύναμις τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ (3:10).

will transform the humility and weakness of those who identified with his ethical paradigm.<sup>240</sup>

What was somewhat missing in the poem, the salvific dimension of Christ's exaltation, is spelled out here, which may explain further the unique use of the word σωτήρ. Whereas the Christ poem only tells the story about the reversal of status *for Christ*, we have an explanation here how this affects *the believers*.<sup>241</sup> They will participate in Christ's glory in an almost physical way, being transformed in their bodily nature.<sup>242</sup>

There is thus a deep and meaningful link between the call to humility, suffering and mutual love and this vision of hope. The weakness and vulnerability the former entails can only be sustained by the perspective of the latter. The horizon of hope, on the other hand, keeps this dynamic and vulnerable space open without reifying it. We are now able to see that it is not accidentally that Paul quotes the whole hymn in chapter 2, including Christ's exaltation. The binding authority of Christ's paradigm and his transforming power in the future belong together. By using regal or imperial language Paul seeks to enhance this point without necessarily wishing to talk *about* the emperor. Paul knows no trajectory from God's theocratic rule in Israel via Christ, the Messiah of God, who upstages Imperial rulers, to a modest 'state' that pays obedience to Christ along O'Donovan's lines. Neither does he know a trajectory from failed theocratic attempts via Christ, the non-violent Messiah of God, who founds an alternative political 'game', provoking the rulers of his day, to the church that lives in critical distance to the state along Yoder's lines.

Paul's focus is completely on the church as the eschatological *polis* that takes its ordering paradigm and its salvific promise from its heavenly government, and can therefore live vulnerably but securely in the world.

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<sup>240</sup> For Hooker, it is of course particularly important that the believers are called to conform *ethically* to Christ's paradigm prior to their glorification ("Christ shares our humiliation, but if we are to share his glory, then we must share *his* humiliation", *ibid.*, 47. For similar statements cf. *ibid.*, 48; 54).

<sup>241</sup> Hooker, *Adam*, 20.

<sup>242</sup> One cannot help thinking of Athanasius' statement that, "God became man so that man might become god" (*De Incarnatione* 54:3, PG 25:192B).

But if the church is such a distinctive *polis*, what might be its interactions with wider society?

## 5.4 Church and ‘State’ in the Eschatological Age

### 5.4.1 A Revolutionary Church?

Paul’s presentation of Christ places the believers into a different world. To state it with the felicitous expression of Peter Oakes, Paul is “redrawing the map of the universe”.<sup>243</sup>

But how are political institutions and the church, the ‘community under Christ’s authority’ to act in this newly drawn out universe?

If “Christians stake their hopes and loyalties in a different commonwealth” do they still need an earthly one?<sup>244</sup> Or is it true that “Christians are not to seek their *politeuma* on earth, since it is a heavenly, not an earthly reality”?<sup>245</sup>

We find, primarily, silence on such questions in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Paul mentions the *πραιτώριον* as the great stage for his Christ witness (1:13). He cannot deny that Roman institutions of justice are at present giving him a hard time, but his genuine hope for release (1:19-21) may also point to a degree of confidence in these same institutions. He sends greetings from the “household of the emperor”, but again, we do not know whether that happens in a perfectly innocuous spirit, reducing things Imperial to some sort of address directory, or whether it happens with a knowing glance.<sup>246</sup>

But maybe it gives us a clue: if Christians can live without a qualm in the household of the emperor, maybe the church can live without a qualm in the cities and lands of the emperor.

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<sup>243</sup> P. Oakes, ‘Remapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians’ in *JSNT* 27.3 (2005), 301-322 (321-322).

<sup>244</sup> Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 234.

<sup>245</sup> Perkins, ‘Theology’, 94.

<sup>246</sup> Fee speaks of a “fifth column” Paul is about to build up by making disciples in the imperial household (Fee, *Philippians*, 459-460).

At least it does not seem to occur to Paul that the Philippian believers, who emulate and embody Christ's character and his charter of rule, are equally to *mediate* Christ's rule over against other rulers.<sup>247</sup> Christ's rule, at present, is meaningful for the Philippian Christians, who are bound by its ethics and sustained by its promise of glory. It would not be totally inconceivable, though, even for the small groups of Christians to aspire for much more, along the lines of Zealot theocrats. They could aspire to a fully politicized space, where Christ rules, and no-one else, save perhaps his chosen representatives. They could even aspire to a distinctive and independent commonwealth with its own laws and courts, with its armed forces and coins. I imagine this vision would be discarded by most scholars as fanciful and ridiculous. However, some of the anti-Imperial proposals border very closely on advocating an independent 'free-state of Christianity', or at least a revolution against existing political structures (cf. 5.3.2.b). If Paul believed that Christ alone was Lord and Caesar was *not*, what would have hindered him from entertaining such thoughts, if only as a feverish religious dream?<sup>248</sup>

From what we can tell, he did not. And this lacuna in his thinking is surely interesting and gives us some questions to ponder.<sup>249</sup>

As in Yoder's and O'Donovan's account we wonder why Paul's political imagery does not lead to a more straightforward political outcome with Christ as the new true Lord (mediated by some chosen earthly ruler) and the church as the true political body upstaging and replacing all others. If it does not, as seems to be the case in Paul as much as in Yoder and O'Donovan, we wonder how the church will interact with wider political institutions and their representatives.

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<sup>247</sup> Fowl, who describes the new 'mindset' or 'practical reasoning' brought about by Christ very sensitively and perceptively, concludes from this that Paul "calls them [the Philippians] out of a false politics ruled by a false savior" (Fowl, *Philippians*, 176), but gives no thought to what this would imply in terms of building a separate political unit, beyond having a distinctive mindset.

<sup>248</sup> Ware, who sees Paul's mission to the Gentiles as modelled upon the eschatological pilgrimage of nations, thinks that Paul's mission inaugurates God's eschatological reign over the nations with a strong anti-imperial thrust to go with it (Ware, *Mission*, 230ff, 255). However, in the Jewish writings Ware presents as background or precedent for Paul's thinking there is always a restored *Jewish nation* at the heart of that hope. Such hopes for a renewed theocratic state and nation in the *eschaton* are actually absent from Paul. It does not occur to Ware to reflect on why this would be the case.

<sup>249</sup> Among the anti-Imperial authors, Wright spends the most careful thinking, beyond the denouncing of Empire, on the interaction between 'state' and church. He repeatedly protests that "Paul is no dualist" (e.g. Wright, 'Paul's Gospel', 178), but it is far from clear how this goes together with "a direct summons to abandon other allegiances and give total loyalty to this Jesus" (ibid., 165).



Can Christians happily exist in their provisional state of being – a community under authority – but neither as a nation nor as a state? Will they, at least as individuals, gratefully use the political institutions offered by their wider society? Is there an overlapping sphere, a bridge between their “πολιτεύομαι” worthily of the Gospel of Christ (1:27) and their “πολιτεύομαι” as Roman citizens or subjects? We will have to keep a special eye on such questions as we turn to the chapters on Romans.

### 5.4.2 Summary

Summing up the observations of this chapter we can say:

- Chapter 3 echoes important expressions of the Christ poem.
- Paul talks about mutual conformity between Christ and the believers, which includes an element of suffering. However, we have little evidence that the major issue of chapter 3 is the avoidance of suffering.
- Paul talks about his re-evaluation of Jewish status markers. From this re-evaluation follows the sharing in both Christ’s resurrection power and his suffering. However, the first few verses of the chapter are best not seen as a two stage *kenosis* modelled upon Christ.
- The end of the chapter uses explicit political vocabulary that was likely associated with Imperial Rome at the time. However, we have no clues at all that Paul uses this vocabulary antagonistically and in a defiant anti-Roman spirit.
- To establish an Anti-Imperial reading from Phil 3:20-21 and to read the entire chapter in that light leads to unnecessary and forced readings of the text, that downplay or overlook the real dynamic and spirit of the chapter.
- Instead it is better to see the chapter as a sequence of themes, which evolve from each other with some overlap, but also with some thematic progress.
- The dynamic of the chapter is very much centred upon a Christian identity, which is somewhat uprooted, forward striving and has a heavenly scope.

- Paul contrasts good and bad attitudes, patterns and focuses throughout the chapter. There are some very broad contrasts (flesh-spirit; earthly-heavenly) but few concrete ethical commands with the exception of forbidding circumcision.
- The heavenly *politeuma* must be read as the Philippians' heavenly government or constitution. Heaven symbolizes realized eschatology in the sense that Christ already owns what lies in the future for the Philippian Christians.
- This heavenly government could be contrasted with the Roman or Philippian government but we have every reason to think that Paul intends a contrast of focus, not of commonwealth.
- Still, the heavenly focus creates a 'community under authority.' As in chapter 2, just stronger, Paul uses Christ's Lordship in a normative, 'political' sense.
- A strong aspect of hope complements the normative use of Christ's Lordship. The missing salvific element of chapter 2 is added here by making it clear how Christ's reversal of status affects the believers.
- While the Philippian church is to *embody* Christ's rule by reflecting his constitution, and to benefit from his salvific rule by being transformed, it is not clear to what degree they are to *mediate* Christ's rule.
- Where we expect utterances concerning the emperor, concerning the city of Philippi and concerning the interactions of Christians with their rulers and their city, there is silence. There is a very odd and meaningful lacuna in Paul's use of political metaphors.
- We see a lot of problems hinted at or set up that O'Donovan and Yoder in their own distinctive ways try to resolve. There is the problem of how the social body that follows God's final authoritative representative, and anchors its hope in that ultimate mediator of God's rule, can still be part of earthly political institutions. There is the problem of how the community under ultimate authority can still follow other authorities. And if it does not and

strives instead towards a more fully politicized existence – will it not betray its non-violent character (Yoder) or its eschatologically delayed identity as the new city (O'Donovan)? All these problems are no problems for Paul, because he does not give his thoughts about 'the rulers of this world' at this stage, and barely any reflections on the implications of the church's political identity as it interacts with other political entities. All that matters for Paul at this stage is to enlist the most powerful political metaphors, which point in his view to spiritual realities that shape the life of the Christ believers in this world. To keep them on track ethically and to encourage them in this often difficult task is his main concern.

## 6. Romans 13:1-7: Nodding to the State?

### 6.1 Introduction

Few New Testament texts have caused as much anxiety as Romans 13:1-7, especially in the era after World War II. Scholars have combined in various and often strenuous efforts to tackle this problematic text.<sup>1</sup> Strategies vary, from relativizing the passage either through contextualizing it in a precise historical situation or literary context, to declaring it to be an interpolation; from claiming that most of the weighty and influential *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text was based on a misreading of it, to seeing the text itself as problematic beyond redemption.<sup>2</sup>

In the following chapters I will investigate this charged text within its literary context and in the horizon of my research questions. I will inquire again whether, and how, the church is presented as a political community; whether, and how, Paul sees some interaction between the rulers of this world and Christ the Lord; and whether, and how, we can trace some interaction between the church and ‘the state’ in the eschatological age.

Due to the scope of these questions, I will have to limit my discussion of secondary literature and, in particular, of the wide range of proposed historical problems that lie behind Romans 13:1-7.

Before I deal with these key questions, I nevertheless want to give some indication as to how I understand this much-debated passage. In a number of exegetical problems I need to make it clear what position I take. This will serve to establish a ‘minimal reading’ of the passage, which will already close some doors and establish some meaning.

I am convinced, though, that this does not preclude further questions but rather lays the foundation for them.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive overview cf. V. Riekkinen, *Römer 13 – Aufzeichnung und Weiterführung der exegetischen Diskussion* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent overview of the immense *Wirkungsgeschichte* cf. U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer: Römer 12-16* (EKKNT VI/3; Zürich: Benziger, 1982), 43-66.

### 6.1.1 Integrity

A minority of scholars<sup>3</sup> see the text as an interpolation and point out that, in 13:1, the flow of the argument is abruptly interrupted by an emphatic call for submission, strangely given in the third person and in the most generalized form (πᾶσα ψυχή). It is argued that 13:8 would organically join 12:21, resuming the theme of ἀγάπη (12:9). However, theological concerns often seem greater than literary ones. Kallas, for instance, views Romans 13:1-7 as diametrically opposed to Paul's theology elsewhere, especially in its apocalyptic forms.<sup>4</sup> While there is a puzzling lack of Christological and eschatological features, it seems problematic to excise the passage because it does not fit a previously established picture of an apocalyptic Paul. We will have to discuss later in what way this passage does and does not connect with Paul's eschatology and Christology.

Over against the exponents of interpolation theories, Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher have established the Pauline character of the vocabulary, despite some unique and rare expressions.<sup>5</sup> Many exegetes have argued convincingly for various thematic and linguistic links between 13:1-7 and its present literary context.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Romans 13:1-7 can be seen as one bead in a chain of apostolic admonishments, which vary from simple commands to more elaborate adhortations (e.g. 12:19), among which Romans 13:1-7 is the most developed example.<sup>7</sup> Finally, some key

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. E. Barnikol, 'Der nichtpaulinische Ursprung der absoluten Obrigkeitsbejahung in Röm 13,1-7' in Kommission für spätantike Religionsgeschichte, ed., *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik: FS E. Klostermann* (Berlin: Akademie, 1961), 65-133; W. Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief als historisches Problem* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975), 191-197; J. Kallas, 'Romans XIII.1-7: An Interpolation', in *NTS* 11 (1964-65), 365-74.

<sup>4</sup> Kallas, 'Interpolation', 367ff. For a similar concern cf. N. Elliott 'Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda', Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 184-204 (184-85).

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Friedrich, Wolfgang Pöhlmann, Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Zur historischen Situation und Intention von Römer 13, 1-7' in *ZThK* 73.2 (1976), 131-166 (147-148).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Jewett, *Romans*, 783; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC, vol. 2; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 652; Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 30-31. Wright takes 12:14-13:7 together under the heading 'the church facing the outside world' (N.T. Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections' in *Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, 1 Corinthians* (The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 395-770 (712). Similarly Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher see the section 12:16b-13:7 as a second main part, "...als dessen Thema man das Leben der Christen in den weltlichen Bindungen bestimmen kann" (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 150).

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 153 suggest that Paul changes from a catalogue-like style of admonition to a more argumentative and reflexive one. "Begründungen gibt Paulus auch in 12, 19 sowie 13,9 und ein Beispiel führt er auch schon in 12,4f an, ohne damit der Geschlossenheit seiner Paränese zu schaden" (ibid., 153).

vocabulary from chapter 12, such as κακός and ἀγαθός (12:2, 9, 17, 21), or ἐκδικέω, ὀργή (12:19), are repeated in 13:3, 4, 5. Verse 7, which is supposedly the last verse in the interpolation, is closely connected with v. 8 by the catchword ὀφείλῃ/ὀφείλω.

I see this passage, then, as a clearly identifiable section, ‘in brackets’, so to speak, but with organic links to the surrounding passage.

### 6.1.2 Political Offices

Most scholars agree that Paul talks about the world of politics in Romans 13:1-7. The very generalized οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ Θεοῦ (13:1b) is followed by qualifications and vocabulary that point to the political realm.

Though Paul does not mention a ‘head of state’,<sup>8</sup> and uses vocabulary which can be used equally for religious authorities<sup>9</sup> and spiritual powers, the vocabulary Paul uses is clearly reminiscent of the language of political administration in the Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher show that while some expressions are not the precise *termini technici* of a Roman jurist,<sup>11</sup> other items of vocabulary match Roman sources extremely well. The double expression of φόρος and τέλος especially corresponds to the expressions “*tributum et vectigal*” as used by Tacitus<sup>12</sup> in describing tax unrest, and makes an association with the various tributes exacted by the political authorities more likely than an allusion to the temple tax.<sup>13</sup> Λειτουργοί was a common expression to denote officials, especially those concerned with finances.<sup>14</sup> Μάχαιρα is also best taken as a real sword, possibly “metonymically, to speak of the right of the just power to exercise its ruling prerogative, probably even

<sup>8</sup> In contrast to 1 Peter 2:13, 17 which mentions the βασιλεύς.

<sup>9</sup> Nanos gives a list of occurrences where ἐξουσία and ἄρχοντες are used for both Jewish authorities and Roman ones, especially in Acts (M.D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996], 302-304). Arthur Ogle sees the ἐξουσία and ἄρχοντες as referring to the “servant-leadership of the church” (A.B. Ogle, ‘What is Left for Caesar? A Look at Mark 12: 13-17 and Romans 13:1-7’ *ThTo*, 35, [1978-79], 254-264 [258]).

<sup>10</sup> The passage contains “hellenistisch-römische Verwaltungssprache” (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 135).

<sup>11</sup> Διαταγή was “kein staats-oder verwaltungsrechtlicher *terminus technicus* für die römische Institution oder öffentliche Verfahrensweise...” (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 139).

<sup>12</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.50-1. For a brief discussion cf. Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 156-159.

<sup>13</sup> *Contra* Nanos, *Mystery*, 308.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 136.

so far as capital punishment”.<sup>15</sup> Marcus Borg suggests that it is a synonym for warfare.<sup>16</sup> It makes sense to take it as a somewhat ‘lay’ expression to point to the armed power of the Roman state to uphold law and order in a variety of situations: from the infliction of (capital) punishment, to the dispatching of riot police or even a military expedition to put down a revolt.<sup>17</sup>

At this stage, a few remarks are in order on the influential proposals which see the ἐξουσία in 13:1 as spiritual entities or as connected to spiritual entities.<sup>18</sup> The discussion has come to a certain closure on the exegetical field after much impassioned debate: (1) On a lexical level, it has been clearly shown that ἐξουσία and ἀρχόντες primarily refer to political institutions in this passage. The context is decisive and clearly decides in favour of the political meaning here.<sup>19</sup> (2) On a canonical level, most ἐξουσία proposals rely heavily on the developed Christologies of Colossians and Ephesians where Christ is increasingly seen as mediator of creation in whom the ἐξουσία and ἀρχόντες were created and persist (Col 1:16, 17), not just conquered. It is closer to Romans to refer to the eschatological panorama in 1 Corinthians 15, where every power and authority will eventually be subjected and dissolved by Christ. But this Corinthian scenario is very much in the future and leaves open in what sense the powers are under Christ now, which is obviously an important concept for various ἐξουσία proposals.<sup>20</sup> (3) The precise implications of Christ’s Lordship over the spiritual powers that presently back up earthly rulers are unclear and at times confusing: Christ’s role seems to oscillate between upholding,

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<sup>15</sup> S. Porter, ‘Romans 13:1-7 as Pauline Political Rhetoric’ *EFN* 3 (1990), 115-139 (132).

<sup>16</sup> M. Borg, ‘A New Context for Romans XIII’, in *NTS* 19, (1973) 205-218 (216).

<sup>17</sup> Similarly Cranfield, *Romans II*, 667.

<sup>18</sup> One of the major exponents is certainly Oscar Cullmann with his initial *Königsherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Theologische Studien 10; Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1941) and later treatment of the matter in his *Christus und die Zeit* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946). For an overview of the post-war debate in the German speaking world cf. E. Käsemann, ‘Römer 13, 1-7 in unserer Generation’, *ZThK* 56 (1959), 316-376 (351-361). For detailed aspects of Cullmann’s very influential thesis I shall quote from the English translation of his ‘final word’ on this matter, the important postscript in O. Cullmann, *The State and the New Testament* (New York: Scribner’s, 1956). In the English speaking world C.D. Morrison has carefully re-visited the Cullmann thesis in his *The Powers That Be* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1960).

<sup>19</sup> Seminal in this line of argument is A. Strobel, ‘Zum Verständnis von Rm 13’ *ZNW* 47 (1956), 67-93. It has to be said though that a predominantly political meaning does not preclude the notion of spiritual forces, operating behind the political scene (cf. Morrison, *Powers*, 57).

<sup>20</sup> “Even though the powers continue to exist, they are stripped of all independent authority” (Cullmann, *State*, 103).

restraining, (re)-commissioning and destroying political authority.<sup>21</sup> This very complex tension and struggle is not at all reflected in Romans 13:1-7. Despite this critical evaluation, the proponents of the ἐξουσία Christology opened a fascinating debate, touching upon important questions about how Christ's present and future Lordship over all cosmic powers squares with political rule. It is no accident that this kind of idea had a long 'afterlife' in systematic theology, even if the underlying exegetical assumptions were, on the whole, rejected.<sup>22</sup> We will turn to the question of whether and how Christ the Lord relates directly to the rulers of the world at a later stage.

### 6.1.3 A Genuine Call to Submission

Paul calls his readers to submit to the authorities as to the servants of God. There is nothing, either in the vocabulary or in the rhetorical development, to subvert this call to submission. On the contrary, in his careful analysis of the pragmatic structure of Romans 13:1-7, Helmut Merklein shows very convincingly that the structure of the argument is designed to inculcate subordination in a consistent and relentless way: "Opponenten gegen den Gehorsam fehlen genauso wie Adjuvanten für den Widerstand. Nicht einmal theoretisch werden entsprechend gegenläufige oder einschränkende Motivationen reflektiert. So fehlt dem Text – von der Argumentationsstruktur her – jede Differenzierung."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to Merklein (though not conversing with him), Stanley Porter concludes from this tightness and consistency of argument that Paul must have only just rulers in view, and therefore, by implication, forbids obedience to unjust rulers. Though, on

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<sup>21</sup> Käsemann asks critically: "Was ist es um eine Christusherrschaft, in welcher die Mächte 'sozusagen gebunden wie an eine Leine, die mehr oder weniger verlängert werden kann' [Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit*, 175], gleichwohl noch ihren Emanzipationsgelüsten frönen können? Wessen ist dann in Wahrheit die 'Scheinmacht'?" (Käsemann, 'Generation', 359).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Barth followed up the positive potential of the ἐξουσία debate: the state is not demonic but made serviceable to the rule of Christ (cf. for instance K. Barth, *Rechtfertigung und Recht* [Theologische Studien 1; Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1944]). In recent years Walter Wink's trilogy has proposed an imaginative theology of confronting, engaging and re-enlisting the powers (W. Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984]; idem, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986]; idem, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992]).

<sup>23</sup> H. Merklein, 'Sinn und Zweck von Röm 13,1-7: Zur semantischen und pragmatischen Struktur eines umstrittenen Textes', *Neues Testament und Ethik* 261.63 (1989), 238-270 (260).



the level of logic, Porter doubtlessly has a point (one can only expect reward for something good from a just ruler), other aspects of his proposal are not convincing.<sup>24</sup> Paul's call to submission is even more accommodating to political power than other voices in antiquity that manage to combine basic submission with a critical attitude.<sup>25</sup>

The affinity of the passage to similar texts in the Hebrew Bible and 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Jewish literature has often been pointed out.<sup>26</sup> Some scholars have seen this tradition-historical background as a way of qualifying Paul's rhetoric of submission. The hidden scope of the text, so the argument goes, is to portray the authorities as the 'servants of God', as opposed to divinized rulers who are accountable to nobody.<sup>27</sup> But while Romans 13:1-7 is certainly far removed from a panegyric for a divine emperor, concepts of accountability of the rulers are simply not unfolded here, or even hinted at. Paul clearly sees the servant status of the authorities as something honourable that commands the respect of their subjects, and not as degrading and potentially infuriating for the former. While the servant theme has the potential to develop some ruler-ethics, this is not spelled out here.<sup>28</sup> Paul does not remind his readers of the authorities' duties, nor of their accountability towards God and the

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<sup>24</sup> The οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ Θεοῦ (13: 1b) flies in the face of an assumed qualification of the powers as denoting the morally superior powers only (Porter, 'Romans', 122-124). Furthermore, as Paul very likely refers to the Christians' present practice of paying taxes to the existing powers (13:6), not to some hypothetical ideal ones, he would portray the Roman authorities as morally superior and just powers in his passage, and the headache for modern readers starts all over again.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher draw attention to Philo's critical comments in *Spec.* 2.92-96, 3.159-63, where Philo castigates the brutal methods of appointed tax collectors (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 154, no.102) and conclude that it is striking "dass die Aufforderungen des Textes zu Steuer – und Zollzahlungen in 13:7b keine eindeutigen und gleichlaufend-positiven jüdischen oder hellenistisch-römischen Parallelen haben" (ibid., 154).

<sup>26</sup> Especially the God-given authority, but also the accountability of rulers, is highlighted by reference to Biblical passages such as 2 Sam 12:8, Jer 27:5, Dan 2:21 and 4:17 as well as Proverbs 8:15-16. and from LXX Wis 6:1-3. From extra-biblical sources Josephus, *Bell.* 2.140, *1 En.* 46:5 and *Let. Aris.* 224 are frequently mentioned. For a full overview of motifs and parallels cf. Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 145-6.

<sup>27</sup> "Romans 13 constitutes a severe demotion of arrogant and self-divinizing rulers" (Wright, 'Romans', 719).

<sup>28</sup> "Für die Kriterien zur Unterscheidung und inhaltlichen Bestimmung des Guten und Bösen ist die staatliche Gewalt nicht zuständig; sie werden ihr von Gott gegeben, sie hat sie nicht nach ihrem eigenen, sondern nach Gottes Masstab anzuwenden. *Doch dieser Aspekt bleibt implizit.* Merkwürdigerweise hat Paulus ihn in diesem ganzen Abschnitt überhaupt nicht zur Geltung gebracht" (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 35, my emphasis). Similarly, Merklein: "Die an sich bestehende Möglichkeit, die Gehorsamsforderung in ihrer Verbindlichkeit unter theologischen Kriterien zu differenzieren, wird vom Text also nicht genutzt" (Merklein, 'Sinn und Zweck', 261). Strobel interestingly remarks that, while parts from the Aristeas letter (*Let. Aris.* 187-291) are reminiscent of a 'Fürstenspiegel', Romans 13:1-7 is rather an 'Untertanenspiegel', which takes for granted the functioning of political authority in accordance with basic ethical standards (Strobel, 'Verständnis', 92, no. 130).

future judgment.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the “Old Testament tradition of honourable resistance to the prevailing civil authority”,<sup>30</sup> is left untouched.

The mention of the conscience in 13:5, and the discerning attitude of thoughtful deliberation presented in 12:2, may soften the notion of submission.<sup>31</sup> By making an appeal to συνείδησις (13:5b), Paul anchors the believers’ obedient submission in a more intrinsic motivation over against simple fear. However, the appeal to the conscience serves, once more, to inculcate submission: ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι (13:5a).<sup>32</sup>

The most convincing claim for an implied qualifier of submission is the argument that everybody will get what is their ‘due’ (13:7) – and by implication no more. Unlike God, political authority cannot claim the whole being as a living sacrifice (12:1). It is plausible that Paul sees this ‘due’ by definition as something limited and well-defined.<sup>33</sup> It may even be that Paul tacitly assumes something akin to the second half of the dominical saying “give to God what belongs to God”.<sup>34</sup> It is equally plausible that Paul identifies what is ‘due’ with what the authorities ask for.

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<sup>29</sup> Luise Schottroff, who assumes the situation of a heavily persecuted martyr church, states that “[i]t is considered highly self-evident that the authorities in power are unjust and that they oppress the people. But unjust rulership is also God’s servant. Its power, however, is borrowed and limited, and it will end before long” (L. Schottroff, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”: A Theological Response of the Early Christian Church to its Social and Political Environment’, in G. Reimer and Willard M. Swartley, ed. and tr., *Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 223-257 (250). Similarly, Wright: “By implication rulers will be judged” (Wright, ‘Romans’, 719); and Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher ‘Historische Situation’, 162; and J. G. Dunn, ‘Romans 13.1-7: A Charter for Political Quietism?’ *ExAud* 2 (1986), 55-68 (64). Merklein on the other hand states very poignantly: “Die Machthaber erscheinen nicht als Gegenüber zum wahren Herrn, sondern als dessen Beauftragte (vv. 2a. 4ad. 6b); der Gerichtsgedanke von Rom 12:19 wird nicht prophetisch gegen die Mächte verwendet, sondern in geradezu gegenläufiger Version gegen die Untergebenen (v. 2 )” (Merklein, ‘Sinn und Zweck’, 261, no. 63).

<sup>30</sup> R. Cassidy, ‘The Politicization of Paul: Romans 13: 1-7 in Recent Discussion’, *ExpTim* 121.8 (2010), 383-389 (387).

<sup>31</sup> “This is an ethic requiring public discussion and spiritual insight and it is far removed from an authoritarian ethic of obedience” (Jewett, *Romans*, 789).

<sup>32</sup> Pace Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher who translate it as “das kritische Selbst- und Verantwortungsbewusstsein des Menschen...” (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 164). This “Selbst- und Verantwortungsbewusstsein” merely prompts the believers to be submissive with conviction, not just out of fear. Cf. the parallels in Col 3:22 and Eph 6:6.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Leonhard Goppelt assumes that the dominical saying about paying the tax (Mk 12:17 et par.) is the single most important tradition influencing Rom 13:1-7 (L. Goppelt, ‘Die Freiheit zur Kaisersteuer [zu Mk. 12,17 und Röm. 13, 1-7]’ in Georg Kretschmar-Bernhard Lohse, ed., *Ecclesia und Res publica: Festschrift Kurt Dietrich Schmidt* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961], 40-50 [48]). Similarly

### 6.1.4 A Positive View of Political Authority

The unqualified positive view of the organs of the state has proved to be one of the most vexing features of the passage.<sup>35</sup> A lot of problems alluded to in the previous section arise from Paul's identification of the concrete authorities with a positive view of political authority as an agent of justice. The text contains two conflicting dynamics that frequently led to what Yoder labels the 'positivist' and the 'normative' view.<sup>36</sup> The former insists, under the impression of 13:1-2, that all existing authority is somehow still God's servant, however cruel or wanting its behaviour. The latter emphasizes the 'job description' in 13:3-4 as the hidden critical potential to hold authorities accountable or even to dispose of unjust rulers.<sup>37</sup>

But Paul draws together the positivist and normative view, assuming whatever powers exist are from God and are functioning according to their ordination (13:1-4). We do not know with certainty whether Paul based his judgment on personal experience, whether it was part of a wider rhetorical strategy,<sup>38</sup> or simply a mixture of wishful thinking and "political naivety".<sup>39</sup> It is often noted that Paul wrote Romans in the promising early years of Nero's reign.<sup>40</sup> The terrible, first explicit lashing out by the head of Roman power against the Christians is still some years

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J. D.G.Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 768. More critical are Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 156.

<sup>35</sup> "Die Problematik der politischen Gewalt rückt überhaupt nicht ins Blickfeld. Das ist das eigentliche Problem des Textes und für uns seine Aporie" (C. Link, 'Anfragen an Paulus: Bemerkungen zu Römer 13:1-7' in *Reformatio* 36 [1987], 438-449 [439]).

<sup>36</sup> Yoder, *PJ*, 199.

<sup>37</sup> This important strand of thinking became especially influential in the Reformed tradition. Wright seizes upon it and says that "...one knows that sometimes holders prove so unworthy as to need removing from office..." (Wright, 'Romans', 721). However, one does not know this from Romans 13:1-7.

<sup>38</sup> Elliott, who sees himself as indebted to Käsemann suggests that we view Paul's theological statements as "mere rhetorical commonplaces" that are unconvincing and dated, while the concrete exhortation and its underlying concerns (in Elliott's case protection for the vulnerable Jewish members, in Käsemann's case calling the enthusiasts back to their "Gottesdienst inmitten der Welt") can still be seen as valuable (Elliott, 'Romans 13:1-7', 188; E. Käsemann, *An die Römer* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 8a; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1974), 313, 338-339). While Paul does not make his few remarks carry much theological and systematic weight in terms of creation order or natural law, they cannot just be discarded like this. Paul makes the conventional wisdom his own at the moment he states it.

<sup>39</sup> Cassidy, 'Politicization', 389.

<sup>40</sup> Reference is made to Seneca's *De Clementia* and its rhetoric of peace and mildness.

away at the time Paul writes his letter.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Paul himself repeatedly suffered unjustly at the hands of political authorities (2 Cor 6:5; 11:23-25, 32-33; Acts 16:22-24). Some scholars, therefore, assure us that Paul knew all too well the evil and unjust things political officials were capable of.<sup>42</sup> In this view, Paul says what he says in order to reach a further goal rhetorically, either in order to make the Roman Christians pay their taxes,<sup>43</sup> to protect vulnerable church members,<sup>44</sup> to pursue a missionary strategy<sup>45</sup> or to discourage the Roman believers from sympathizing with the Zealot movement.<sup>46</sup> The precise function of Paul's rhetoric in the context of his wider theology has to be discussed later on and is important. Two caveats are in order at this point.

Firstly, the various proposals concerning the rationale for the passage are often connected with tentative historical reconstructions that sometimes border on the speculative. It seems to be wise to search for a "recurring life situation" rather than a "concrete reason".<sup>47</sup> The surest point of contact between the text and external

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<sup>41</sup> *Contra* Schottroff, who backs up her scenario with anachronistic material from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and mistakenly reads the state officials as agents of persecution into Romans 12:17-18 (Schottroff, "Give to Caesar...", 224-225).

<sup>42</sup> Paul did not have a rosy view of Roman government but knew that even a bad system can still display a "certain level of divine authorization" (Wright, 'Romans', 718). "Paulus redet höchst profan von situativ erfahrener, und mitunter höchst repressiv erfahrener Macht" (Link, 'Anfragen', 441). "Paul does not idealize the situation he is addressing. He does not pretend the authorities of whom he speaks are models of the good ruler" (Dunn, 'Charter', 67).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Merklein, 'Sinn und Zweck', esp. 264-267). Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher argue similarly by taking the tax issue as the motivating rationale for the exhortation (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', esp. 161). Of course, this begs the question why Paul is so keen on the tax-paying issue in the first place.

<sup>44</sup> Very concretely, Elliott, who assumes through a number of historical conjectures that tax riots would hit the struggling Jewish community in Rome hardest after it had only just recovered from the expulsion under Claudius in 49 AD, concludes: "Popular unrest occasioned by tax abuses might readily be deflected onto the Jews..." (Elliott, 'Romans 13:1-7', 191). Dunn also assumes a strategy of prudence which is especially commendable for minorities: "Paul's reminder is in effect to say: Since you cannot change the terms under which you live, and since your position is already hazardous, remember the political realities of the politically powerless and live accordingly" (Dunn, 'Charter' 64). Similarly, Heiligenthal, who speaks of Paul's "Einsicht, dass das Überleben einer Minorität nur durch die Konformität gegenüber übermächtigen äusseren Machtstrukturen garantierbar bleibt" (Roman Heiligenthal, 'Strategien konformer Ethik im Neuen Testament am Beispiel von Röm 13:1-7' in *NTS* 29.1 [1983], 55-61 [58]).

<sup>45</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 780-803, esp. 792-794.

<sup>46</sup> Zealotism has been a popular dark foil for Romans 13:1-7 throughout the ages (for the Patristic Era cf. H. Schelkle, 'Staat und Kirche in der patristischen Auslegung von Römer 13:1-7, *ZNTW* 1952-53, 223-236 [234-235]. In modern times, among others, Borg, 'New Context' and E. Bammel, 'Romans 13' in Ernst Bammel & C.F.D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of his Day* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 365-383 [esp. 368; 370] consider the Zealot hypothesis).

<sup>47</sup> Schottroff, "Give to Caesar..." 227.

historical evidence seems to be the tax issue.<sup>48</sup> If this throws some light on the historical situation Paul wrote in, then he was careful to discourage the Roman Christians from joining protests or withholding their taxes, which they probably had not done so far.<sup>49</sup> These options are best seen as the likely alternatives to full submission, rather than positing a zealot temptation that would lead the Roman Christians to join a nationalistic, armed uprising in following “a Christian version of the so-called fourth philosophy”.<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, attempts to contextualize Paul’s words must not lead us to downplay the positive tone of the section to the point of assuming a through and through negative assessment of the authorities on Paul’s part. Paul may have readily conceded that certain exponents of political authority can at times act unjustly or overstep their boundaries.<sup>51</sup> But his default view of political authority, not just as an ideal but as something that was concretely experienced, was positive: “Governments, even oppressive governments, by their very nature seek to prevent the evils of indiscriminate murder, riot, thievery, as well as general instability and chaos, and good acts do at times meet with its approval and praise.”<sup>52</sup> It may well be that parts of Paul’s audience cringed at his presentation of the state. But this does not mean that they were bound to search for meaning behind the lines or were forced to understand Paul’s words as irony.<sup>53</sup> It is quite possible, and too often forgotten by modern

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<sup>48</sup> Again, Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, ‘Historische Situation’, 156-158, give an especially full and careful summary of the restlessness surrounding issues of taxes and revenues as described by Suetonius, *Nero* 10.44 and Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.50-51.

<sup>49</sup> A majority of scholars seems to think that διὰ τοῦτο γάρ favours an indicative reading of τελείτε in v. 6. Cf. e.g. R. H. Stein, ‘The Argument of Romans 13:1-7’, *NovT* 31.4 (1989), 325-343 (340-341); Cranfield, *Romans II*, 668; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 766; Käsemann, *Römer*, 346.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, ‘Romans’, 719. The (beginning) conflict in Judea was probably something the Jewish diaspora was aware of, but it is unwarranted to conclude from Paul’s call to submission that there was an inclination for armed revolt on the part of the Roman Christians. Kallas rightly asks, “Is there no middle ground between active support and hostile rebellion?” (Kallas, ‘Interpolation’, 370).

<sup>51</sup> Ogle and others draw attention to Romans 8:36 – the only other mention of μάχαιρα in Romans – that contradicts Romans 13:3 and 4 (Ogle, ‘What is Left’ 254-264, 258), and gives the latter verses, “...a hollow and cynical ring in a martyr’s ears” (ibid., 260). There is undeniably a tension. Still, I cannot find anything in Romans 13:1-7 that hints at that reality or takes it as its subversive starting point. Paul’s own experiences of being mistreated by the authorities stand somewhat unrelated beside his assumption that the authorities are something good by default, just as his conviction of the ‘badness’ of every human being does not prevent the authorities from performing good things.

<sup>52</sup> Stein, ‘Argument’, 334.

<sup>53</sup> *Contra* T.L. Carter, ‘The Irony of Romans 13’ in *NovT* 24.3 (2004), 209-228. Carter is certainly right in drawing attention to the likely felt contrast between Paul’s description of authorities and his readers’ daily experience, especially when they were from among the poor and disenfranchised or had suffered abuse as Jews (ibid., 210-211). It is far from certain, though, whether Paul’s words are

interpreters, that Paul and many of his contemporaries genuinely valued the existence of a measure of law and order, despite all the failures of representatives of the state.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, I propose to take the passage as a clearly marked off, somewhat self-contained reflection on how to interact with political authorities. However, this passage is nevertheless part of a wider context of exhortations and clearly connected with that context. Paul has a somewhat sober but by default positive view of political authority. There is some theological reflection on political authority, which is endorsed, but not unfolded, by Paul. The issue is presented in very general terms, as is the naming of the authorities, but as Paul's exhortations unfold, it also becomes clear that he likely speaks of concrete Roman officials, who wield power in the service of law and order and who collect taxes. However, Paul's addressees are those subject to political authorities, not the authorities themselves. The pragmatic structure of this text is shaped towards the inculcation of submission, though Paul's arguments evoke a few Jewish and possibly Jesus traditions, which have a richer potential of meaning, such as elements of resistance or prophetic protest. Paul simply wants the Roman believers to fulfil their obligations and pay their taxes. We do not know for sure what prompted Paul to urge these civic duties. Neither can we infer from the text what alternatives (withholding taxes, joining street protests, armed revolution) the Christ believers were tempted to pursue.

## 6.2 The Church as the Community under Authority

We concluded the section on Philippians wondering whether the 'community under Christ's authority', which is a tangible social entity, still needs other socio-political communities or whether it is self-sufficient or even intent on replacing other communities and societies.

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"recognisably implausible or unacceptable..." (ibid., 213). Even if legal protection was wanting for the poor, and arbitrary state violence was shockingly common from a modern perspective, it is still possible that a robust government with all its faults and shortcomings was still preferred to the all-pervasive violence of civil wars or anarchy. If Paul's words sounded "either naïve or crass" in the Roman believers ears, as Carter suggests (ibid., 211), they may have opted for the first possibility.

<sup>54</sup> Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher remind us that for many people, the Roman rule brought "damals in der römischen Welt auch in bisher unbekanntem Umfang Frieden und öffentliche Ordnung" (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 163). Later persecuted Christians, who struggled with 13:3 could still argue that "for your good" (13:4) pointed to the fact that even persecuting judges punished criminals (Schelkle, 'Staat und Kirche', 224).

Our overall impression from Philippians was that this community does not face the outside world in general and the political world in particular with a through-going antagonism. We suggested that the heavenly *politeuma* though offering a focus, binding norms and ultimate hope is not neatly juxtaposed with the Roman or Philippian *politeuma* in particular but very broadly with ‘earthly things’.

If there was still any doubt left about the believers’ willing participation in and active contribution towards the political structures of the outside world, Romans 13:1-7 disperses it. We have no notion of a separate community in Paul’s brief political exhortation. The opening *πάσα ψυχή* (13:1) does not even address the Christ believers as people who are singled out through their faith (as *ἅγιοι* would indicate), nor people whose special relationship with each other is highlighted (as *ἀδελφοί* would indicate).<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, they are lined up with everybody else. Just like everybody else they are to submit, render their due, show respect and pay their taxes. What happened to the ‘community under the authority of Christ’? Has it completely disappeared from the picture?

If we include the context of Romans 13:1-7, in particular Romans 12 in our considerations, as the various verbal connections between Romans 13:1-7 and Romans 12 encourage us to do (6.1.1) the picture greatly changes. Paul addresses the believers as *ἀδελφοί* (v.1)<sup>56</sup> and speaks of the needs *τῶν ἁγίων* (v.13).<sup>57</sup> Paul uses cultic language (*θυσία*, *εὐάρεστον*, *λατρεία*) in v.1 to sum up the believers’ life as a whole-hearted and very much embodied commitment and devotion to God.<sup>58</sup> The Christ believers are explicitly exhorted not to conform to the *αἰὼν οὗτος* (v.2) but are to transform and renew their minds in order to be equipped to discern the perfect

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<sup>55</sup> Pace Cranfield who translates *πάσα ψυχή* “in the context of Romans [as] ‘every Christian (in Rome)’” (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 656). Of course Romans is only addressed to Christians (in Rome) but in my view it is better to translate: “Just like everybody, you, too”.

<sup>56</sup> An insider, though not an exclusively Christian term, as Cranfield, *Romans II*, 631 points out.

<sup>57</sup> Though this exhortation like others in this text calls for concrete deeds done to concrete people the term *ἅγιοι* “als urchristliches Selbstprädikat” must not be narrowed down to include only one very specific group among the Christ believers (correctly Käsemann, *Römer*, 334, pace Jewett, who makes a fascinating attempt to relate this and other commands of our passage to the specific situation around the forced exile and recent return of Jews and Jewish Christians [Jewett, *Romans*, 764]).

<sup>58</sup> The emphasis here seems to be on a committed *life* rather than focusing on martyrdom, but cf. Phil 2:17 where Paul uses strikingly similar vocabulary to talk about his imminent death, and again almost the same words to characterize the Philippians’ (financial) gift (Phil 4:18). Cultic language is certainly used in a very broad way, emphasizing costly and total dedication, though it may not be used primarily with an anti-cultic or anti-ritualistic edge (pace Käsemann, *Römer*, 315, 317).

will of God. Some key vocabulary from 12:2 (μεταμορφοῦμαι, συσχηματίζομαι) is familiar from Philippians 2: 6, 7 and 3:21.<sup>59</sup> But while in Philippians this vocabulary refers positively to Christ's example and eschatological transformation, in Romans Paul uses it as a warning not to conform to 'the world'. The theme of proper discernment is reminiscent of Philippians 1:10. The right kind of φρονεῖν, so important in Philippians (Phil 2:2, 5; 3:15; 4:2, 10) is equally prominent in this chapter (cf. the different cognates of φρονεῖν in 12: 3 (4x), 16 (3x)).<sup>60</sup> Paul wants the Roman believers no less than their Philippian brothers and sisters to live in mutual harmony, unmarred by haughty pride.<sup>61</sup> Paul unfolds this ideal with the image of a body, which is one well-functioning organism even though it is composed of very diverse μέλη (12:4-5).<sup>62</sup> This image from the political world was well-known in antiquity.<sup>63</sup> The church in Rome is to see itself as ἓν σῶμα ἐν Χριστῷ (12:5) and its members are to use their diverse gifts well in the service of the whole body (vv.6-8).<sup>64</sup> While Christ is not presented as an exemplar there are a number of concrete attitudes and virtues Paul calls for from v. 9 onwards. Among these varied exhortations we find calls to mutual love, honour and care (vv. 9, 10, 13) as well as appeals to an eager, joyful and spirit-filled service, to patient suffering and continuous prayers (vv.11-12) –a remarkably similar spiritual pattern to the one we have noticed in Philippians.

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<sup>59</sup> Cranfield concludes after a lengthy discussion that the two verbs should not be distinguished too sharply and advocates the translation 'conform' and 'transform' (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 605-607).

<sup>60</sup> Jewett translates the pun in 12:3 very nicely with being "superminded" and "sober-minded" (Jewett, *Romans*, 736).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the reference to ταπεινοί in 12:16. Cranfield specifies that μὴ τὰ ὑψηλὰ φρονοῦντες (12:16) refers to haughtiness, not to ambition (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 643-644).

<sup>62</sup> Käsemann brings the dedication of the σώματα and the σῶμα of Christ together very well by emphasizing the aspect of "Kommunikationsfähigkeit" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 315, cf. also 326) of the human existence in a body. Through the body we relate to others rightly, though Paul seems to focus on the body of Christ as the primary field of such right relations (*pace* Käsemann, who never tires of pointing out the (individual) Christian's "Gottesdienst inmitten der Welt" *ibid.*, 313, 315, 317, 318, 326).

<sup>63</sup> Jewett gives among others the examples of Plutarch (Plutarch, *Phil.* 8), Aesop's and Menenius Agrippa's fables of the revolt against the stomach, until the body nears starvation (Aesop *Fab.* 132; Livy, *Hist.* 2.32), Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *Antiq. Rom.* 6.86.1 and others (Jewett, *Romans*, 743; also cf. Cranfield, *Romans II*, 617). For further uses of the image or similitude in a more cosmic sense cf. *ibid.*, 743; Käsemann, *Römer*, 324).

<sup>64</sup> The image is not just at odds with individualistic forms of piety but just as much with collectivistic ones, as Käsemann rightly notices: "Dabei ist beides zu betonen: Der Geist fordert jeden Einzelnen ganz und konkret in seinen besonderen Verhältnissen und macht ihn zu einem neuen Lebenswandel fähig. Er tut es zugleich so, dass der Einzelne sich damit als Glied der Gemeinde erweist" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 312; similarly but less clearly Jewett, *Romans*, 728 [collective aspect] and 729 [individual aspect]).



There is a note of tension visible in v. 14 and then again from v.17 on. The notion of πάντες ἄνθρωποι (vv.17, 18) suggests that the focus shifts from inner-Christian relationships to interactions with those outside the church, especially with hostile people. I will say more about this section and this transition in the passage ‘Church and State in the Eschatological Age’ (6.4).

Despite the strong communal ethos no particular appeal is made to the ‘Lord Jesus (Christ)’ or to the ethical pattern he embodied. Τῷ κυρίῳ δουλεύοντες is almost mentioned in passing and rendered as τῷ καιρῷ in some textual witnesses.<sup>65</sup> We have to wait until 13:14 for Paul to make his powerful appeal to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’. 13:11-14 is written in a style of apocalyptic urgency.<sup>66</sup> Sleep and watchfulness, night and day, light and darkness are contrasted with each other. The final σωτηρία is closer than ever. As in Philippians 3:19 excessive sensual pleasures and divisive attitudes are given a quick, sharp glance. They function as the anti-paradigm, the dark foil, τὰ ἐπίγεια in Philippian language.

Romans 12-13 is thus framed by sections which present the church as a distinctive socio-political community (a body) in critical distance from ‘the world’ (12:2), rejecting a number of concrete practices in wider society (13:13) and building up its own distinctive ethos by the renewal of its mind (12:2) and by ‘putting on the Lord Jesus’ (13:14).<sup>67</sup>

The apocalyptic black-and-white language is however moderated into attempts to negotiate relationships with outsiders, especially hostile ones.<sup>68</sup> These attempts become clear in 12:14-21 but also in 13:8-10, as I shall argue below (6.4.4.3).

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<sup>65</sup> There is no scholarly consensus on this problem. For a thorough discussion cf. Cranfield, *Romans II*, 634-636.

<sup>66</sup> Jewett claims the same tone for 12:1-2 and accordingly translates παρακαλέω as ‘to urge’ (Jewett, *Romans*, 724, 726).

<sup>67</sup> Dunn’s reflections on the σῶμα imagery lead him to assume that “it would give his readers a sense of coherence and identity which could sustain them over against the larger body politic in which they lived and worked” while also seeing it as “a countermodel of social identity no longer reducible to merely ethnic or cultural categories” and even as “a model for the functioning of the wider (secular) society” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 733).

<sup>68</sup> What is less obvious at first glance is a fair measure of shared *ethos* with wider society, as the section “Church and State in the eschatological age” (6.4.) will show.

But what does it mean that in the middle of these two chapters, with their very cutting-edge apocalyptic ‘wings’ there is the admonition: “Be submitted, as everybody else”? Do the apocalyptic wings relativize the political admonition in 13:1-7? Do they even very shrewdly undermine the surface content of Paul’s words? We have to pay close attention to these questions when we explore the relationship between church and political authorities in 6.4. But first, some inquiries about how Christ’s Lordship relates to earthly rulers and powers are needed.

## 6.3 The Rulers and the Lord

### 6.3.1 Introduction

The church, though presented as a recognisable socio-political unit in the neighbouring sections of Romans 13:1-7 is not very much portrayed as a community under the Lordship of Christ. In fact, the notion of the Lordship of Christ is almost absent in chapters 12-13. If Christ is not very much portrayed as the Lord of the church he is even less said to be the Lord of the political authorities. As we have seen, the latter notion has been disputed, and creative attempts have been made to highlight Christ as the lord over the ἐξουσίαι by means of importing eschatological scenarios of Christ defeating the powers (or presiding over them) from other (post-)Pauline letters. While this is not an illegitimate exegetical experiment it seems to be more natural to ask how the concept of Christ’s Lordship is being used in *Romans* rather than in 1 Corinthians, Colossians and Ephesians.

Do we find that Paul uses references to Christ the Lord mostly in an ecclesial context in the wider letter? Or is this present and future Lordship sometimes seen in interaction with other powers and rulers, both spiritual and political? How might these two levels connect with each other?

In the following sections I seek to give a brief survey of how κύριος language is used in Romans. The section is divided into three parts:

- 1) The abounding of κύριος language in chapters 14 and 16. 2) The formula Διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν and 3) Free-standing uses of κύριος

### 6.3.2 Romans 14 and Romans 16

While Christ's authority is not particularly highlighted to define the church in chapter 12, κύριος language abounds in chapter 14, which deals with issues of communal (dis)harmony.<sup>69</sup>

Paul tries to mediate in a (potential) conflict and to bring together two factions which are in tension over certain laws about food and special days.<sup>70</sup> Paul insists that both parties should have their way, though he sides with the 'strong' ones in thinking that everything is pure. It is more important in this conflict that both parties can respect and welcome each other than that one group manages to convince the other of its truth.<sup>71</sup> While the weaker party is given priority of consideration and respect, its concerns are effectively declared to be of no fundamental theological relevance in the course of the argument.<sup>72</sup> In pursuing his goal Paul makes frequent appeals to 'the Lord': The believers' behaviour, both the abstinent and the permissive practices have to be directed to or for τῷ κυρίῳ (14:6, 7) just like the whole of life and death is oriented towards τῷ κυρίῳ (14:8). V.9 states the comprehensive and universal Lordship of Christ over dead and living alike.<sup>73</sup> This Lordship of Christ is the overarching reality of life that unites the different parties. They have to view each other as ἀλλότριον οἰκέτην (v.4).<sup>74</sup> Judging a fellow-servant is strongly discouraged;

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<sup>69</sup> Κύριος serves as 'leitmotif' of 14:1-12 (Jewett, *Romans*, 832).

<sup>70</sup> A lot of recent exegetes think that specifically Jewish concerns are involved (for an overview of the discussion and arguments for this view cf. J.M.G. Barclay, '“Do we undermine the Law?”: A Study of Romans 14.1-15.6' in J. D.G. Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 287-308 (288-293: 'The Situation addressed in Romans 14.1-15.6').

<sup>71</sup> Horrell helpfully sums this up as "an appeal for mutual regard, for an 'other-regarding' morality" (D. G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 115. For the same text cf. also *ibid.*, 182-189.

<sup>72</sup> "...Paul patronizes the weak and tips the theological balance in favour of the strong, even while attempting to make the scales even" (Barclay, 'Law', 304). "While, *on the surface* and *in the short term*, Paul protects the Law-observant Christians, in the long term and at a deeper level he seriously undermines their social and cultural integrity" (*ibid.*, 306, emphasis original).

<sup>73</sup> "This, to be sure, is a *kuriotes* over human persons only; but to be Lord of the domain of dead and living is, nevertheless, a 'cosmic' position" (C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977]), 44. "It is the completeness of the Lordship which is in view here..." (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 808. However, "[t]he object is clearly to relativize the disputes on food and days within the perspective of God's overarching purpose in Christ" (*ibid.*, 808).

<sup>74</sup> The image originally arises from a master who is not to meddle with the domestic affairs of another *dominus* (cf. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 803-804) but is used here to portray Christians as house-slaves, who are not to hold accountable their fellow servant, who is only answerable to his or her master (cf. also Cranfield, *Romans II*, 702-703).

instead it has to be left to the Lord (14:10).<sup>75</sup> The frequent mentions of κύριος from 14:4-8 could refer to God or Christ. God is mentioned in the opening of the section (v. 3). On the other hand we have the climax of v. 9 where Paul depicts Christ as the one who died and became alive again ἵνα κυριεύσῃ over the dead and the living.<sup>76</sup> On the whole Paul seems to use God- and Christ-language in strikingly interchangeable ways.<sup>77</sup> God has welcomed (προσελάβετο) the fellow-believer (14:3), something Christ is said to have done (14:7) and the believers are called to do as well (15:7; 14:1). The description of the Lord, who can make the believer stand (14:4) has connotations of both the final judge (God in 14:10) and of an upholding saviour, which is perhaps more reminiscent of Christ.<sup>78</sup> The all-encompassing rule ascribed to Christ, expressed in the comprehensive language of “the dead and the living” (14:9) is repeated and varied with the quotation from Isaiah 45:23 (14:11), but this time – unlike in Philippians 2: 10- *God* is the one who receives universal homage.<sup>79</sup>

Paul’s appeal to the ‘Lord’ has connotations of gracious acceptance, but also of sovereign rule, and finally of a future perspective of judgment. ‘The Lord’ is at the same time the uniting basis without whom the Roman Christ believers would not be in the same group in the first place, and also the present master who will not permit a

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<sup>75</sup> “Richten kann man nur für wen man zuständig ist, nicht fremdes Eigentum” (Käsemann, *Römer*, 357). The similarity with Romans 2:1 is interesting, though what Paul has in mind in Romans 14 seems to be each believer’s accountability before his or her Lord, rather than the notion of all-pervasive sinfulness (pace W.A. Meeks, ‘Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1-15:13’ in G.F. Hawthorne and O. Betz, eds., *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 290-300 (296)).

<sup>76</sup> Capes rightly points out the connection between the title κύριος and Jesus’ resurrection in early Christianity (D. B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* [WUNT: Reihe 2, 47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992], 53-59 (53)).

<sup>77</sup> This is confirmed by a degree of ambiguity among the textual witnesses. Κύριος in Rom 14:4 is rendered by some as θεός and θεός in Rom 14: 10 as χριστός. Wilckens talks about “dem ständigen Ineinander von Christozentrik und Theozentrik” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 85).

<sup>78</sup> Jewett paints quite a credible picture of a divine κύριος though, who has authority but who also welcomes people into the fellowship of his house (Jewett, *Romans*, 841).

<sup>79</sup> Fee makes an interesting case for reading κύριος as ‘Christ’ in 14:11, taking the solemn introduction ζῶ ἐγώ that alters the LXX text of Isa 45:23 (perhaps combining it with Isa 49:18) as a reminiscence of the Christ who came back to life (14:9). In Fee’s reading, all people appear before the βῆμα of God, bowing their knees before Christ and giving account (about their eating or non-eating) to God (G. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007], 262-265). Similarly Capes, *Yahweh Texts*, 126-128. Capes suggests that 14:11a refers to every knee bowing before Jesus and every tongue making confession before God the judge (ibid., 128). Kreitzer reads κύριος as God here (L. J. Kreitzer, *Jesus and God in Paul’s Eschatology* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 108); similarly Cranfield, *Romans II*, 710). Both suggestions seem possible and show the close overlap if not fusion of God and Christ-language in this section.

fellow-servant or fellow-slave to act as a master themselves, and the coming Lord and judge of all. The imagery moves from the domestic context (οἰκέτης) to the more political imagery of homage to a king (v.11).<sup>80</sup> These two aspects reinforce each other: the universal images of Christ's or God's rule are the broader horizon which keeps the Roman believers together in mutual harmony and respect. However, the *location* where this horizon becomes meaningful in the present is the church as the 'household of faith'.<sup>81</sup> Presumably Paul would not call outsiders οἰκέται despite the universal depictions of Christ's and God's Lordship.<sup>82</sup> This does not mean that the Christ believers are a slightly idiosyncratic group God has to deal with or a group with their own cult-god, Christ.<sup>83</sup> What happens in the church is a foretaste for God's overall goal with humanity. After all, the harmonious praise of both groups in one body corresponds to God's final *telos* (cf. 15:6).

Once again, Paul appeals to the Lordship of Christ (and God) in a rich and subtle way. The dimension that is once again lacking is any reflection on what it means for *earthly rulers and masters* that Christ is Lord and master. Surely the image of the κύριος to whom alone a house-slave is answerable has potential to be used critically against the far-reaching claims of a *pater familias*.<sup>84</sup> Surely the image of universal homage could be used in a most subversive way against those who claim to be the

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<sup>80</sup> The limits of the domestic metaphor are already clear in v. 4c (Käsemann, *Römer*, 357). It seems to me that the point of contact between the domestic master and the royal judge lies in the prerogative of κρίνειν.

<sup>81</sup> This image is only present in the οἰκέτης but cf. Gal 6:10. Jewett makes a lot of the household metaphor and seeks to combine it with the hospitality theme surrounding προσλαμβάνομαι (Jewett, *Romans*, 841-842). He draws attention to the distinction between an "inalienable member of the household, including slaves" (ibid., 841) and hired slaves. His claim that the welcome of the master of the house has an equalizing impact is perhaps a bit strong, as there can still be hierarchies among the household-members, even if they are in a fundamentally similar position towards the master. Meeks points out that the slave-comparison quickly gives way to the 'brother' address (Meeks, 'Judgment', 295).

<sup>82</sup> Wilckens reads v. 9 as "Christi Herrschaft über alle, *die ihm gehören*" (U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer: Römer 6-11* [EKKNT VI/2; Zürich: Benziger, 1980, 84, my emphasis], assuming that the verse is about believers, who cannot even be separated from their Lord by death, because Christ has overcome death. Similarly Jewett states that "...the mystical relationship of living and dying with Christ provides a new context for all other issues" (Jewett, *Romans*, 848) and adds that the ἡμῶν in v. 8 refers to believers (ibid., 848). Dunn similarly discovers "in-house covenant language" in 14:16: The behaviour on the inside must not give reason for 'blasphemy' by outsiders (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 831).

<sup>83</sup> Schlier rightly states that "...dieser Herr, dem wir leben und sterben, kennt als der Gestorbene und jetzt ewig Lebendige keine Grenze seiner Herrschaft" (H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* [HTH KNT 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1977], 410).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. this with Eph. 6:9, where the (Christian) κύριος is indeed put in relation with the heavenly one.

rulers of this world. But this is not the way Paul uses these images. The Lordship of Christ, though universal and unlimited, is first and foremost bent towards an ecclesial application.

With the explicit commands on how to deal with political authorities just being a few verses away, this is all the more striking.

Κύριος is used again with some frequency in the greeting section Romans 16:3-16. Paul greets a number of people as fellow believers ἐν κυρίῳ whose work for the gospel happens also ἐν κυρίῳ. Paul seems to use the phrase interchangeably with ἐν Χριστῷ,<sup>85</sup> which suggest that they are synonyms here and depict the people in this section as being within the realm and sphere of the salvific and commanding Lordship of Christ Jesus.<sup>86</sup>

### 6.3.3 Διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

Κύριος is used a number of times in the formula (διὰ) Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.<sup>87</sup> Sometimes there is the variation ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν (6:23; 8:39). There is one Dative, τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Χριστῷ (16:18) and one accusative where the Χριστός is missing (4:24). The formula is of course a full and solemn title of Jesus and may well have been used before Paul, perhaps in a liturgical context.<sup>88</sup> Paul uses it elsewhere in his letters.<sup>89</sup> However, the frequent ἡμῶν is striking. It is only missing in two cases: The benediction in 1:7 omits it, but clearly because the preceding θεοῦ πατρός has attracted it.<sup>90</sup> The vivid phrase ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν (13:14) has no ἡμῶν either.<sup>91</sup> Maybe the first person plural would be redundant here because the whole sentence is an imperative in the second person

<sup>85</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 892; Käsemann, *Römer*, 397.

<sup>86</sup> Dunn suggests that it is the intimate rather than the authoritative aspect of the term which is highlighted here (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 887).

<sup>87</sup> 5:1; 5:11; 5:21; 7:25; 15:30 have the διὰ, 1:4, 15:6 and 15:20 have only the phrase in the genitive without the διὰ.

<sup>88</sup> For the διὰ formula cf. the statistics and genealogical considerations in W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (tr. B. Hardy: Studies in Biblical Theology 50; London: SCM, 1966), 84-90.

<sup>89</sup> 1 Thess 1: 3; 5: 9, 23, 28; 1 Cor 1: 2, 7, 8, 9, 10; 5:4 (without Christ); 15:31; 15:57; 2 Cor 1:3; 8:9; Gal 6:14, 18. Philippians has five occurrences of the triple formula but without the ἡμῶν (but note 3:8). Among the disputed Pauline letters Ephesians and Titus use the expression frequently.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3, Phil.1: 2 and Phm 1:3.

<sup>91</sup> There is considerable variation of the formula in the textual tradition, including the form Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν.

plural, addressing a plurality of people, who will become ἡμεῖς through putting on Christ. The full formula is used in the initial greetings of the letter (1:4) and in a closing benediction 16:20.<sup>92</sup> Most of the occurrences appear in chapters 5-8, though.<sup>93</sup> In fact, these chapters are all solemnly concluded with this formula.<sup>94</sup> Apart from giving weight to a statement (as in the case of an admonition, cf. 15:30), the formula always appears to confirm an aspect of salvation, or to sum up a salvific gift: the believers have peace with God (5:1), are able to boast because they have received reconciliation (5:1) and are told that grace rules through righteousness into eternal life (5:21), all διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. Similarly, in chapter 8 they learn that nothing can separate them from the love of God τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν. I think not only chapter 5 but also chapter 8 is a “meditation on hope.”<sup>95</sup> Both chapters assure the believers that their salvation is firmly established and rooted in the love of God that is definitively and irrevocably expressed in Christ Jesus. Both chapters touch upon the issue of suffering and have a wide cosmic scope. Christ is the last Adam (chp. 5), salvation is promised to the whole creation and cannot be endangered by cosmic powers (chp.8). Between these two wings of hope there are two meditations on sin: Chapter 6 reflects on the two modes of being conquered by sin and of being liberated from it. Sin leads to death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν as Paul sums it up (6:23). Chapter 7 gives an exposition of why the law cannot deal with sin, a theme that is continued positively (what the law could not, Christ and the Spirit can) in 8:1-11. The cry χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν in 7:25 is the bridge between chapter 7 and chapter 8, looking forward to the solution to the dilemma and the redemption of the ἄνθρωπος of chapter 7, who is in a dire situation. No matter how the various problems surrounding these verses must be solved,<sup>96</sup> the verse certainly

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<sup>92</sup> A majority of textual witnesses include Χριστοῦ while a few major witnesses omit it.

<sup>93</sup> Fee notes with astonishment “...that up through ch. 9 it [Kyrios language] occurs only in the threefold combination ‘Lord Jesus Christ’; after that, when it does appear on its own, it comes in bunches” (Fee, *Christology*, 254) though he makes nothing of the ἡμῶν.

<sup>94</sup> Chapter 4 already has it in an incomplete form (Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν) in v.24. Chapter 5 has the formula three times, opening it (5:1), recapitulating it in the middle (11) and concluding it (21). This pattern is noted, too, by C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; vol. 1; London: T&T Clark, 1975), 444.

<sup>95</sup> F. B. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007 [rev. and exp. Edition]).

<sup>96</sup> There is considerable debate on whether v.24 represents the cry of a person outside Christ, whose plight of sin is then resolved by faith in Christ, as the cry of redemption of 25a testifies and whose

sums up and expresses “the agency of Christ’s redemptive activity”.<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, after the lengthy meditation on the tormented ‘I’ Paul expresses his thanks through *our* Lord.<sup>98</sup>

After 8:39 the full formula does not appear until 15:6, where it circumscribes God as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and sums up the goal of the divine history as Jews and Gentiles being united in praise of God. Maybe this last occurrence could give us a clue to the ἡμῶν. As a number of scholars have worked out in recent decades there is an important social and communal dimension to the narrative of Romans, which in its crucial moments deals with the coming together of Jewish and Gentile Christians (or ‘Greeks’ as Paul calls them) in one body.<sup>99</sup> This issue is sometimes addressed as a problem as we have seen discussing chp.14, sometimes seen from a divine bird’s eye view that brackets the Christ-event but clearly presupposes it by showing the God who deals impartially with both Jews and Gentiles (1-4; 9-11, 15).<sup>100</sup> If “...in Romans 5, the Jew-Gentile issue that has dominated the letter to this point disappears completely”<sup>101</sup> could it be that the emphatic ἡμῶν carries through the theme of ‘united in Christ’ in these chapters?

The one who can be described as the κύριος πάντων (10:12), oscillating between the impartial God and the Christ who is the universal saviour (see further below) is referred to as κύριος ἡμῶν when Paul talks about the vision of salvation as seen from

former plight is summarily remembered in 25b or whether a Christian recognizes his or her awful situation in the light of Christ and looks forward to final eschatological salvation (25a) while continuing to struggle in the tension between flesh and spirit (25b). Despite some thoughtful meditations by Cranfield and Dunn on spiritual maturity, which does not diminish but fully express the tension of the Christian caught between the ages (Cranfield, *Romans I*, 366-370; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 410-412) I am inclined to follow Jewett’s view that 25b is a recapitulation of the dilemma of the ‘unredeemed sinner’ presented in chp.7, which does not hold any more for the Christ believer (Jewett follows Dodd in translating αὐτὸς ἐγὼ as ‘left to myself’, Jewett, *Romans*, 473). In 25a Paul has already burst into the cry of victorious redemption leading the way to the theme in chp. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 473. Dunn aptly calls Christ “the embodiment and expression of God’s saving purpose” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 411).

<sup>98</sup> “Although the reason for his former misery was unique, he shared the experience of unmerited grace with all other believers” (Jewett, *Romans*, 473).

<sup>99</sup> “The purpose of Romans is to encourage Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, divided over the question of the law, to set aside their differences and to worship together” (Watson, *Paul, Judaism*, 186). In Dunn’s words Paul in Romans 1-11 has “redrawn the boundaries of the people of God...” in proclaiming a “redefined people of God” (Dunn, *Romans*, 9-16, 705).

<sup>100</sup> “Here [in chapter 14]...the idea of God’s impartial acceptance of the two groups is expanded to include an aspect of mutual acceptance between the two groups themselves” (J. M. Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 164.

<sup>101</sup> Watson, *Paul, Judaism*, 269.



the inside, appropriated by faith. This vision is much broader and wider than what is presently and empirically true for the believers. But it is a vision from the inside and has as its foremost priority the new social reality that the Lordship of Christ establishes in the *church*.

What about other rulers, then? What about powers and principalities? It is certainly noteworthy that Paul can speak of various rivals of God's good purposes in Christ, which also 'rule' or whose rule is being brought to nothing through Christ. Death no longer κυριεύει over Christ (6:9), neither should death's ally, sin, rule over the believers (6:14). Similarly, the law rules in a problematic way (7:1).

Derived from βασιλεῖν, Paul can state that just as sin or death 'ruled as king' (5:17, 21; 6:12) so does grace now (5:21) and – quite astonishingly – the believers themselves ἐν ζωῇ (5:17).<sup>102</sup> The Lordship of Christ leads to the end of some rules and establishes his own rule of grace and life, in which the believers participate and to which they owe obedience (6: 14b). It may well be that the apocalyptic language of darkness and light of the context of Romans 13:14 implies that Paul talks about the "Herrschaft Christi, welche den weltbeherrschenden Mächten schroff entgegensteht."<sup>103</sup> Perhaps we could count the very strong expression ὑπερνικῶμεν in Romans 8:37 as 'ruler vocabulary', too.<sup>104</sup> It is in this section that ἀρχαί and δυνάμεις (8:38) also make an appearance, vocabulary, which can be used to point to concrete rulers.<sup>105</sup> The Lordship of Christ is thus clearly played out before a cosmic horizon and brought into interplay with other ruling powers and authorities. On the

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<sup>102</sup> "The surprising feature of v.15 is that the 'how much more' figure is attached to the subject, 'those receiving the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness,' rather than to Christ. It is the believers who "will reign"..." (Jewett, *Romans*, 383). This could again point to the ecclesial context of rule. What is depicted is not a battle between Christ and the powers of death but how, through Christ, the believers are transferred to the sphere of life and will, in some form, 'be kings' ("Das Plus der Gnade besteht in dem Wechsel aus dem Bereich des Todes in denjenigen des Lebens als der Auferstehungsmacht" Käsemann, *Römer*, 147). The aspect of 'ruling' is rightly in the future tense, though the believers can already now taste the "true kingly life" God had in mind for people (Cranfield, *Romans I*, 288).

<sup>103</sup> Käsemann, *Römer*, 351, similarly Jewett, *Romans*, 828: "The formula 'Lord Jesus Christ' recurs here from 1:7, placing lordship in the place of emphasis."

<sup>104</sup> Jewett, following Zeller, translates it very vividly as being 'supervictors' (Jewett, *Romans*, 548).

<sup>105</sup> The ἀρχαί do not appear with their usual partner ἐξουσίαι (which is remarkable, given Romans 13:1) but instead with ἄγγελοι which understandably gives both terms more associations with the spiritual world (e.g. Cranfield, *Romans I*, 442). Jewett's suggestion that ἀρχαί mentioned here must be political rulers because the δυνάμεις following the pair are spiritual powers is not very convincing (Jewett, *Romans*, 552).

whole these rival rulers are portrayed in the broadest possible cosmic terms, especially in chps. 5-6 and in the short list in Romans 8:38-39.<sup>106</sup> Though they can certainly materialise in one concrete power or another, this broad cosmic dimension transcends any narrow and stable identification.<sup>107</sup> The point Paul makes is that no conceivable power or even structuring feature of reality (such as death and life) can separate the Christ-believers from their Lord.<sup>108</sup>

### 6.3.4 Κύριος used on its own

Κύριος as a freestanding noun can either refer to God or to Christ and is used in that ambiguous sense quite a few times in Romans.<sup>109</sup> These mentions, mostly quotations from OT texts have provoked considerable scholarly interest, as they can give us clues to what extent God's and Christ's agency overlap in Paul's thinking and how Christology can be seen as colouring Paul's understanding of God.<sup>110</sup> In this section I will concentrate on the passages where the title refers with a degree of certainty to Christ, as my concern is to get a better idea of Paul's presentation of Christ's Lordship in Romans. The most interesting passage in this respect is Romans 10:1-13<sup>111</sup> where κύριος is rendered once in the context of a Christological confession (10:9), once in the context of an OT quotation (10:13, quoting Joel 2:32) and once in a statement about impartiality (10:12).

In 10:9 Paul has summed up the Christian confession as κύριος Ἰησοῦς. The striking aspect of this verse is that κύριος is not just used as a title for Jesus (Christ) but the human name is correlated with the title in an act of confession or homage in a way

<sup>106</sup> “..die gegensätzlichen und polaren Kräfte des Kosmos...” (Käsemann, *Römer*, 242).

<sup>107</sup> Especially the list in Romans 8: 35-36 partly points to suffering inflicted by human and possibly governmental hands (cf. the brief discussion of μάχη of 8:35 above n. 51 and Jewett, *Romans*, 547).

<sup>108</sup> The point is less – *pace* Käsemann, *Römer*, 243- that the powers are seen to be illusory. Cranfield formulates better that “there is no spiritual cosmic power, whether benevolent or malevolent, which will be able to separate us from God's love in Christ” (Cranfield, *Romans I*, 442).

<sup>109</sup> Romans 4:8; 9:28, 29; 10: 12, 13, 16; 11:3, 34; 12:11 (with some textual uncertainties), 19; a few mentions in 14:11; 15:11 apart from the two clusters of very frequent mentions of κύριος in 14:4-8 and 16:8-17, which we have already discussed.

<sup>110</sup> There is no space here to follow up the debate on whether the Greek versions available to Paul rendered the Tetragramm with κύριος already (but cf. Fee, *Christology*, 20-25 (Paul and the Septuagint); Kreitzer, *Jesus and God*, 108-110; Capes, *Yahweh Texts*, 39-43 and G.E. Howard, ‘The Tetragramm and the New Testament’ *JBL* 96 (1977), 63-83.

<sup>111</sup> I agree with Rowe's analysis that “10:13 is the rhetorical (and theological) climax of 10:1-13...” (K. Rowe, ‘What is the Name of the Lord?’ in *HBT* 22 (2000), 135-173 (140).

very similar to Philippians 2:11. The drawing together of “Jesus the Lord” and God, who raised him from the dead, suggests that it is through the resurrection that Jesus becomes Lord.<sup>112</sup> If this is so, Christ’s Lordship is rooted in nothing less than a life-giving, divine act (cf. Romans 4:24). It is not established by human faith or confessions but merely acknowledged and appropriated by the latter. The confession that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is connected with the ‘mouth’ in distinction, but not separation from the faith that is believed in the ‘heart’. This makes it likely that the confession is more than a private conviction and at least situated within an ecclesial, if not a further public, context.<sup>113</sup> The realm or character of Christ’s Lordship is not further specified. He is not called the ‘Lord of all’ at this point, nor is his Lordship confessed by everybody but clearly by those who believe that God raised him from the dead and are saved by that faith. The keyword of salvation makes likely an identification of the κύριος in 10:13 with Christ as well, especially because both verses aim at σωτηρία,<sup>114</sup> the theme of the passage as indicated in 10:1, 10.<sup>115</sup> However, salvation language can be both related to God as the initiator of salvation (God’s power into salvation: 1:16; God, the past and present agent of salvation: 9:27; God as the one granting salvation, 10:1), and to Christ, through whom it is mediated (5:9, 10) in Romans.

The middle verse, 10:12, is strongly reminiscent of the theme of impartiality, a quality that Paul has connected with *God* so far (2:11 and 3:29),<sup>116</sup> but the phrase οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή has been mentioned before in 3:22, where it is associated with faith in Jesus Christ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας.<sup>117</sup> The phrase αὐτὸς κύριος πάντων is applied to Christ in Acts 10:36 and recalls again the κύριος Ἰησοῦς of v.9.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Acts 2: 32 and Capes, *Yahweh Texts*, 53-59.

<sup>113</sup> For a brief discussion on whether the phrase has its ‘Sitz im Leben’ in baptismal liturgy cf. Wilckens, *Römer 6-11*, 227. Confession before the authorities is a possible scenario, though “durch nichts angedeutet” (Käsemann, *Römer*, 281). Jewett emphasizes the connotation of ‘loyalty’ in the term ὁμολογέω including political loyalty, as shown in Josephus *Bell.* 7.418 (Jewett, *Romans*, 630).

<sup>114</sup> σωθήσῃ in 10:9 and σωθήσεται in 10:13.

<sup>115</sup> Fee rightly points out that Paul does not merely borrow LXX language at this point to express his Christology, but sees the confession that Christ is Lord (9:10) as “the fulfillment of the eschatological promise inherent in that text [Joel 2:32]” (Fee, *Christology*, 258).

<sup>116</sup> Bassler states that in chapter 3 divine impartiality “was elaborated by an argument based on the fundamental confession of one God (3:29-30), here the emphasis is similar, but with a Christological basis instead” (Bassler, *Impartiality*, 161).

<sup>117</sup> “This [10:12] is the positive equivalent of 3:22” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 610).

<sup>118</sup> Jewett draws attention to interesting extra-biblical parallels where κύριος πάντων or κύριος ἀπάντων refers to a ruler (Jewett, *Romans*, 632). Jewett concludes that “the formulation of this verse

Similarly, 10:13 could refer both to the κύριος who mercifully initiated salvation and the one who embodied it. As in chapter 14 it seems that from the perspective of faith that contemplates God's saving action in Christ, the persons of God and Christ fuse at times.<sup>119</sup> At any rate κύριος is presented as κύριος πάντων, no matter whether it refers primarily to God or Christ here.<sup>120</sup> This universal Lordship is appealed to with the distinctive goal of uniting Jews and Gentiles in one salvific reality, which is Christologically defined and by implication ecclesial:<sup>121</sup> The *locus* of salvation is Christ, also for Jews. Gentiles on the other hand can through Christ confidently call upon the God of Israel, who has mercy in store for them, too. This is certainly no parochial story: Being the "Lord of all" (v.12) has a cosmic horizon.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps we could say that God establishes his impartiality through the raising of Jesus as the representative of the one humankind, the new Adam, whose death reconciles and whose life saves (Romans 5:10).<sup>123</sup> However, the immediate use of this universal concept seems to be in establishing the two groups as one and therefore in an ecclesial application once more. What seems to be less important at this stage is the comparative strength of Christ's Lordship, his exaltation over all other powers and his victory over them.

### 6.3.5 Summary

Summing up all these observations we can say:

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proclaims Christ as the one replacing the emperor in establishing a new realm of plentitude in which all are treated equally" (Jewett, *Romans*, 632).

<sup>119</sup> Rowe rightly stresses that "the statements in 10:9 do not require us to emphasize *either* Jesus *or* God, because they are, in fact, inseparable: *Jesus* is *Lord* because *God* raised *him* from the dead. The confession is thus christo-theological" (Rowe, 'Name', 144). Despite this insight Rowe is emphatic about identifying the κύριος with Jesus. I think the mere quote from the OT makes the expression more oscillating and will evoke God, the author of salvation as much as Jesus, the agent of salvation.

<sup>120</sup> Cranfield points out "the persistent emphasis in vv.11-13 of the idea of universality: πᾶς – οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή – πάντων – πάντας – πᾶς" (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 532). Paul alters the LXX by adding a πᾶς when quoting Isa 28:16 in Rom 10:11 (Jewett, *Romans*, 631).

<sup>121</sup> "Das Heil wird in der christlichen Gemeinde gefunden" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 282).

<sup>122</sup> "An eschatological scenario is...apparent in 10:9-13 as well, where 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (see Isa.28:16; Joel 2:32), a salvation linked explicitly and tightly to the confession of Christ's resurrection from the dead and ascended lordship (see also 11:15)" (D. A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul*, [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009], 686).

<sup>123</sup> Watson draws the verse together with the Christology of Romans 5 and its universal and cosmological dimensions (Watson, *Paul, Judaism*, 275). Käsemann rightly says that Jesus "ist zugleich der Kyrios der Welt, welche durch das Geschehen der Auferweckung sowohl ihr Ziel wie ihre Krisis erhält" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 281).

- Paul's talk about Christ's Lordship in Romans often serves to emphasize solemnly the salvific reality that has been brought about by Christ and is appropriated in Christ, summing up passages that talk about the benefits of God's acts in Christ.
- Paul often uses the phrase κύριος ἡμῶν in these summaries. This may well be to carry through the theme of "two groups becoming one in Christ" in Romans 5-8, where there is no mention of 'Jews' and 'Greeks' anymore.
- Christ's Lordship is used to describe something that establishes a web of salvific relationships, from God to the believers and to each other. The focus is far less on Christ's Lordship as an absolute, freestanding reality outside the realm of faith, and the community of faith and much more on its function as the God-anointed agency that constitutes and upholds this new community.
- Of course, this does not mean that Christ's Lordship is only true within the realm of faith. The confession of 10:9 makes this clear. Similarly, Paul can talk about the κύριος πάντων which establishes God's or Christ's Lordship as 'objective' and universal.<sup>124</sup>
- The ecclesial context is thus set in a cosmic horizon, especially in chapters 5-8. Various larger than life agents wrestle with each other. The Christians are to see themselves on the victorious side, through and in Christ. However, believers are never told to attack these agents, to resist or conquer the powers. They are simply said to be among those who rule and overcome and should not let adverse powers rule over them.
- We have no reason to think that Paul discards his view of Christ who will, at last, subject all powers and authorities as he stated in 1 Corinthians 15. Morrison's statement that, "The early confession of Christ as Lord was not just an affirmation of personal allegiance, but a conviction with regard to the purpose of God, the present order of things, and their sure destination"<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "Die in aller Welt erwachsende Gemeinde ist in diese über sich hinausweisende Fülle gestellt" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 282).

<sup>125</sup> Morrison, *Powers*, 112.

holds true for Romans, too. Chapter 8 is especially fruitful in providing a horizon of Christ's ultimate and final Lordship. But somehow, this struggle is seen much more from the inside, as a struggle that implicates the believers as agents and sites of this struggle, as those who are involved in the dynamics of Christ's death and life. Paul does not talk a lot about 'Christ and the powers' but rather about the community that is under Christ's authority, not only anchored in it and fully defined by it ('put on the Lord Jesus') but also drawn towards an indestructible hope through it and protected from all adverse powers.<sup>126</sup> This is never better expressed than in 8:37 when Paul says that ὑπερνικῶμεν διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς, not, through him, who has overcome, or who will at last conquer, all the powers and rulers.<sup>127</sup>

- Paul's concept of Christ's Lordship in Romans is distinctly ecclesial and relational in the first place.<sup>128</sup> The *ecclesia* made up of Jews and Gentiles lives under Christ's Lordship. This principal actor, or site of agency, is set into a cosmic horizon. The saving space in Christ that unites Jews and Gentiles is also the space where partly in the present, partly in the future, sin, death and every other destructive power are overcome.
- Paul's ecclesio-centric use of the Lordship of Christ is a feature he shares with Yoder's and O'Donovan's narrative. They never tire of making it clear that the location where Christ's Lordship is at present confessed, experienced, sacramentally re-enacted (O'Donovan) and ethically reflected (mostly Yoder but also O'Donovan) is the church. It is in the church where the at present

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<sup>126</sup> In developing these thoughts, I am greatly indebted to Morrison, who critically evaluates and rephrases Cullmann's 'Christ and the Powers' theory. Morrison, though convinced that "...the concept of civil government was, by nature of ancient thought, inseparable from that of spiritual powers" (Morrison, *Powers*, 57), gets puzzled as to what concrete impact the lordship of the risen Christ over the (spiritual) powers has on political rulers. He reaches the bold conclusion that, "When we call the emperor forth to view his new Christological clothes in broad daylight, we find that there are none..." (ibid., 116), and that "it is not that something has happened to the principalities and powers... Rather it is that the love of God in Christ has effectively delivered those who believe from the dominion of trespasses and sins (2.1, 4). *The locus of Christ's victory is the Church*" (ibid., 117, my emphasis). I endorse these statements as extremely useful 'first words' but not as the final statement in the discussion of whether political rulers are affected by Christ's authority at all.

<sup>127</sup> I would like to modify Jewett's statement, "The Lordship of Christ extends over all the powers, in heaven and on earth, and its motivating center is love" (Jewett, *Romans*, 554), by stating that "The Lordship of Christ extends over all the powers and it is through Christ's (or God's) love that the believers participate in the victory over the powers."

<sup>128</sup> Cranfield affirms this for Romans 14 (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 709).

invisible and non-coercive Lordship of Christ leads to tangible communal structures and social practices. Both Yoder and O'Donovan also have a keen sense of the greater cosmic horizon of this Lordship. Paul's focus on reassurance and comforting hope is more reflected by Yoder than O'Donovan: Yoder encourages the church to embrace its own lack of power and influence through its hope for God's final victory. Both authors take their starting point with the church, but do not stop there. The church is the main actor in a divine drama that transcends ecclesial boundaries. Christ is the (future) Lord of the whole world. In O'Donovan's and Yoder's narrative this belief does not merely encourage faithful endurance and enduring mission, but sets a certain agenda for the church's interactions with political authority. We shall see that in Paul's narrative this is not the case.

We have had to ask one of our central research questions ("The Lord and the lords") in a slightly awkward, roundabout fashion, due to lack of evidence in the texts in question. Our quest for the concept of Christ's Lordship in the whole letter to the Romans has yielded a few important parameters and pointers. But how is all this connected to Romans 13:1-7 or, more broadly, to Romans 12-13?

It is probably safe to assume that Paul tacitly sees the church he portrays in chapter 12 as the community under the authority of the risen Lord. This theme is as prominent in Romans as it is in Philippians and comes to the fore when a distinctive lifestyle under an urgent apocalyptic horizon is asked for (13:14), when there is tension and (potential) disharmony (14), but also in a series of affectionate greetings (16).

It also makes sense to see Romans 13:1-7 as being put into the wider framework of an apocalyptic horizon, where the new community of Greeks and Jews awaits its final σωτηρία. It is quite plausible that this little group is not particularly impressed by other programs of σωτηρία, including political ones.

Romans 8: 31-39 provides an overarching cosmic horizon, into which everything else is set, including the political realities described in Romans 13:1-7. Paul's statements about powers and principalities in Romans 8 come closest to proposals of 'Christ and the powers'.

Christ is clearly portrayed as the ultimate lord, stronger and more victorious than any other lords. The unjust killing of the *μάχαιρα* in the hands of unjust rulers (8:35), reminds the readers that political rulers and the spiritual forces behind them may well at times turn against Christ-believers *qua* believers and in that sense become the enemies of Christ. It is likely that the Roman readers of Paul's letter will not have forgotten this aspect when they proceed to read Romans 13:1-7 with its very positive view of political authority.

The fact that these two aspects co-exist side by side in Paul's letter could suggest that political authority cannot by default be identified with an evil or a good spirit, even if the reading of Romans 13:1-7 and Romans 8:35 in isolation might encourage such a view. The sword-bearers, we have to assume, can be the servants of God at times and fall under the sway of evil powers, pressing in on the Christ believers. Even in the latter case it is not clear at all that the rulers are Christ's enemies because they call themselves 'lords' or by virtue of being rulers. Even in the worst case, alluded to by Paul, when officials use their power in order to persecute God's chosen ones, the tone is on assurance to the believers that they cannot be harmed by them in any final way. They live in hope in the middle of sufferings and are secure in the one who loved them over against all threatening or destructive forces.

If this is Paul's word on the worst case -rulers become persecutors- what about the best case, which Paul optimistically portrays as the normal case in Romans 13:1-7?

We still do not know how Christ responds to other claims of rule and authority as such and in what Christ's relationship with a variety of rulers might be. Is Christ the new ruler of the rulers? Does that change their scope and 'job description'? Are they conquered or rather re-enlisted, consciously or unknowingly in order to serve Christ's purposes? Or is Christ God's theocratic alternative to any earthly political rule, casting a long and threatening shadow? The silence in Romans 13:1-7 on these issues is enormous. The authorities are repeatedly called the servants of God, but, very tellingly, not servants of Christ.

If talking about the relationship between Christ and the authorities is extremely difficult, assessing the relationship between the church and the authorities may be more promising. In the next section I will look at a central term in Romans 13:1-7: τὸ



ἀγαθόν. I will ask what ‘the good’ stands for and whether the authorities and the Christ believer have a (partially) shared notion of ‘the good’. Through contrasting and comparing the life of the church in chp.12 and the activities of the rulers in chp.13 I hope to be able to say more about ‘The interaction of the church and the state in the eschaton.’

## 6.4 Church and State in the Eschatological Age

### 6.4.1 Introduction: What is τὸ ἀγαθόν ?

In describing whether and how Paul locates the activities of the authorities on an eschatological map, it is of special importance to get a more precise notion about how Paul uses τὸ ἀγαθόν, both in 13:1-7 and in the wider letter. Is there at least partial overlap between the new Christological ‘good’ that the church enjoys and embodies and the activities of political authorities? Are political authorities re-arranged in the face of this new and better ‘good’? With this question we touch upon a central issue in O’Donovan’s and Yoder’s narrative, which we have shown to be particularly complex if not problematic. Both authors re-assess the activities of the authorities in the light of Christ as either problematic and in need of improvement (mostly Yoder, less so O’Donovan), or as potentially pretentious and in need of more modesty (mostly O’Donovan but also Yoder). Both authors assume that church and ‘state’ embody different ethical paradigms and stand in a dialectical tension. Both authors also struggle to build bridges towards an ecclesial witness to the authorities, which is meant to engage and change them. We shall see that Paul takes a surprisingly different stance in these questions.

The authorities are described as θεοῦ διάκονος...εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν (v.4). We have tried to establish that this is a non-ironical statement and that Paul endorses it even if it is mainly used to establish a further rhetorical goal. Still, questions remain: What does τὸ ἀγαθόν precisely refer to?<sup>129</sup> ἀγαθόν and κακόν are of course in some sense self-

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<sup>129</sup> “Eine inhaltliche Qualifizierung des ἀγαθόν oder Kriterien dafür werden nicht genannt” (Merklein ‘Sinn und Zweck’, 247).

evident categories. They are used to qualify and assess something else.<sup>130</sup> But what are the criteria for such a qualification?

The notion of ‘the good’ has fascinated a number of exegetes. It has been recognized frequently that ἀγαθόν and κακόν belong to the vocabulary that links Romans 13:1-7 with its context, especially chp.12 (cf. 6.1.1). In addition, the occurrences of ἀγαπ\* vocabulary in 13:8-10 and the reference to ἀγάπη in 12:9 have interested many scholars. Can ἀγάπη be seen as the Christian or eschatological good? And if so, in what way is this ‘good’ connected to the ‘good’ the authorities achieve? Is there partial overlap or even sameness?

#### a) Maximum and minimum readings

On a maximum reading, the ‘good’ of Romans 13: 4 could be seen as a seamless good that originates in God and albeit differentiated into various sub-categories of ‘good’ always points to the highest good of (communion with) God. This maximum reading opens the door for a (possibly nuanced or differentiated) theocracy or Christocracy in which the civic good must not and cannot be separated from the spiritual good, and where the authorities have to care both about their subjects’ physical well-being and their eternal salvation.<sup>131</sup> On the other end of the spectrum we have a minimal reading of τὸ ἀγαθόν as referring merely to a limited concept of ‘some good’, either of minimal law and order or some kind of bourgeois or civic decency.<sup>132</sup> Yet other scholars are uneasy with what they see as all too tight

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<sup>130</sup> “Ἀγαθόν (“good”) is the generic term for the highest moral quality in the Hebrew wisdom tradition and rabbinic ethics, in Hellenistic Judaism, in classical and later Greek philosophy, and in the Roman value system, with definitions that fluctuate according to those intellectual contexts” (Jewett, *Romans*, 734).

<sup>131</sup> This route is not taken very often in contemporary scholarship, for obvious reasons. It made however perfect sense to many reformers who did not want to abandon but transform and renew a vision of the *Corpus Christianum*. The Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer and his ‘De regno Christi’ is an impressive example, assigning differentiated but almost equally weighty roles to spiritual and temporal authorities in bringing about the Kingdom of Christ (Martin Bucer, ‘De regno Christi’ in W. Pauck, ed., *Melancthon and Bucer*, LCC XIX [London: SCM Press, 1969], 174-394).

<sup>132</sup> Strobel states that ‘the good’ denotes “...in diesem Fall keine theologisch-ethische Qualifikation, sondern allgemeine bürgerliche Ordentlichkeit” (Strobel, ‘Verständnis’, 67-93). Similarly Käsemann, *Römer*, 345: The good are seen as “hier zweifellos die bürgerlich Rechtschaffenen” and “Das Gute ist auch hier nicht auf das Gottesverhältnis...bezogen, sondern auf die allgemeine Ehrbarkeit.” Against this view cf. Link, ‘Anfragen’, 445.

boundaries between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’<sup>133</sup> - between what God has revealed in Christ as ‘good’ and what is perceived by the general public as civic good. This scholarly group wants to allow for some overlap and fusion between civic and Christian good without advocating a theocracy. Some authors suggest that love functions as the new criterion and sometimes critique for what the state officials do.<sup>134</sup> *Ἀγάπη* is the new gold standard the authorities are held accountable to in the eschatological era. It often remains unclear though what this concretely means and it seems to be a malleable concept: Wilckens speaks of the state as protecting love whereas scholars like Yoder and Schottroff suggest that the church’s ideal of love, especially enemy love, shows up the activities of the state as deeply wanting. In the latter view, ‘the good’ must be understood in a tentative and basic sense: God can use something that is basically problematic in the service of something good in the greater design of things.<sup>135</sup> Possibly connected to this view are statements that God has -unknown to the authorities- taken them captive for his greater eschatological design.<sup>136</sup> The authorities are somewhat cunningly co-opted as God’s servants in the eschatological mission.<sup>137</sup> Sometimes this is complemented by the thought that Christians, too, can gradually invade, influence and take over the world of politics and make it serviceable for God’s Kingdom.<sup>138</sup> A lot of these proposals reflect

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<sup>133</sup> ‘Sacred’ and ‘secular’ are not very helpful categories in my view as the Roman state can hardly be called ‘secular’ in our modern sense ( *pace* P. Towner, ‘Romans 13:1-7 and Paul’s missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?’ in S.K. Soderlund and N.T. Wright, eds., *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 149-169 (164). It is better to inquire where and whether the mission of the church and the task of the authorities overlap at times.

<sup>134</sup> Dunn, ‘Charter’, 67. In Dunn’s view Paul breaks down the barriers between cult and civic life that were characteristic for Judaism: “Whether this is a case of sacralizing the state or rather of desacralizing the cult is left open” (Dunn, ‘Charter’, 66). This is somewhat odd, if Paul supposedly just repeats old Jewish commonsense in the passage (*ibid.*, 65). Wilckens very strongly emphasizes love as the new criterion in many places: “Die Liebe ist die christliche Definition des Guten” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 20). More cautiously Merklein: „Zumindest der faktisch vorhandene römische Staat wird sich in seinem Verhalten kaum an der christlichen *ἀγάπη* orientiert haben.“ (Merklein, ‘Sinn und Zweck’, 246).

<sup>135</sup> The latter is a thought emphasized by Schottroff: “It is considered highly self-evident that the authorities in power are unjust and that they oppress the people. But unjust rulership is also God’s servant. Its power, however, is borrowed and limited, and it will end before long” (Schottroff, ‘“Give to Caesar...”’, 250).

<sup>136</sup> Borg offers the somewhat disturbing proposal that the Roman Christians are to see the Roman army as the chosen instrument of God’s salvation that punishes Jewish nationalism and eradicates its false particularity, which has been made obsolete in Christ. (Borg, ‘New Context’, 217).

<sup>137</sup> “That the true and only God made the publicani and their bureaucratic overseers into his “ministers” was an audacious act of co-option” (Jewett, *Romans*, 800).

<sup>138</sup> Very strongly so Towner, who suggests that through the Christians’ active involvement in society and the world of politics the latter is slowly taken over for God’s eschatological plans: “The call of

concerns that make sense to modern theological sensibilities that have some bitter lessons from the ills of uncritical nationalism and imperialism as well as from political quietism: Of course we want no theocracy but neither do we wish to see Christians act in unpolitical ways, turning their back on the world. Of course we need responsible citizens who are guided by the ideal of love and do some good in the state, which is also somehow good because nobody can possibly want anarchy. These ‘instincts’ need not be wrong, and some of them may well sum up accurately what Paul wants to communicate. Still, they do not settle in themselves the open exegetical questions. As far as I can see it is seldom probed in more depth how Paul’s message of love and grace and the good of the authorities connect or disconnect. In the following section I try to offer a modest beginning to such an inquiry.

#### **b) The inquiry of this section**

In order to shed more light on this question I am first going to trace Paul’s use of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the wider letter of Romans. I will not merely look up passages where *κακός* and *ἀγαθός* make an appearance but I will trace the movements of how God according to Paul deals with good and bad in Paul’s great proposal of his gospel. Good and bad are mostly perceived as ethical categories, though with an openness and close connection to salvific goods or losses. Such a ‘tour d’horizon’ is obviously a daring enterprise and innumerable hotly debated fields of exegesis and Pauline theology will just have to be quietly passed by or at least quickly brushed aside. However, I still think that this quick overview can offer valid insight for the passage in question. In a second move I will probe *κακός* and *ἀγαθός* language in the immediate literary context of Romans 13:1-7 a bit more deeply.

The following questions will guide me:

- How are good and bad known?

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God directs the church to engage fully in the world in order to bring about transformation of its ways and values” (Towner, ‘Missiological Perspective’, 168). “The pattern within Romans merges the secular and the sacred as God’s eschatological rule reaches the whole of creation (8:18-23, 31-39, 11:33-36) a corollary of the mission to the Gentiles.” (Ibid., 164)

- Is there a specific or higher ‘Christian good’?
- Does the Christ event change the categories of good and bad? Are the categories made obsolete? Or is their content changed?

## 6.4.2 Good and Bad in the Wider Letter

Can the good and the bad be known at all?

Paul starts his argument with an utterly dark picture of human actions, giving repeatedly a depressing list of evil deeds and attitudes. (1:23-32; 2:21-24; 3:10-18). The mere talk about ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as well as expressions such as ποιεῖν τὰ καθήκοντα (1.28) seem to presuppose a shared notion of these concepts among Jews and Gentiles. It is likely that Paul’s first and notorious list 1: 23-32 is targeted at denouncing Gentile sins, especially in his highlighting and intertwining of homosexual behaviour and idolatry (23ff.). This criticism would not be shared by everybody in a Greco-Roman audience, but would gain a lot of approval from Jewish hearers and readers.<sup>139</sup> When Paul in 2:1 accuses a (most likely Jewish) interlocutor of doing the very same things he frowns upon,<sup>140</sup> he obviously has to drop the charge of homosexual behaviour and of idolatry. Instead he mentions adultery and includes the strange charge of temple robbery (2:22).<sup>141</sup> In the florilegium 3:9-19 of mostly Psalm quotations Paul paints the image of human beings that are at war at every level with their fellow human beings, which is summed up in v.17: ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν.

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<sup>139</sup> Exegetes draw special attention to very similar denunciations of pagan idolatry in the Wisdom of Solomon (cf. U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer: Römer 1-5* (EKKNT VI/1; Zürich: Benziger, 1978), 96-97 and other Jewish-Hellenistic writings (for a list eg J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC 38a; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 61).

Other scholarly voices see Paul’s polemic as inclusive, since Israel, too, fell into idolatry (Jewett, *Romans*, 162).

<sup>140</sup> For the debate surrounding the identity of the interlocutor cf. R.M. Thorneissen, *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (ConBNT 40; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003).

<sup>141</sup> Among others Cranfield struggles with this seemingly bizarre and unfair charge by invoking “still more subtle forms of complicity in idolatry” (Cranfield, *Romans I*, 169).

#### 6.4.2.1 The commonsensical approach to good and bad

Paul thus affirms that good and bad are sufficiently known by everybody (1:19).<sup>142</sup> God is portrayed as an immortal, invisible and just deity, who has created the world and revealed himself in it (1:19, 20). God's wrath is provoked by being deprived of the human responses that are his due, namely thanksgiving and glory (1:21) and God therefore hands human beings over to drown in their own sins and confusion (1:24, 26, 28).<sup>143</sup> There is certainly enough revelation available to hold people accountable (1:20), because God has given to every person the knowledge of good and bad.<sup>144</sup> Where there is no Torah there is conscience, which supplies the same knowledge (2:15).<sup>145</sup> In addition to God's immediate and immanent "handing over" (1:24, 26, 28) there is a future judging day, the *ἡμέρα ὀργῆς* (2:5), which no-one will escape (2:2, 3). The future judgment opens up a temporal space in which God holds back his wrath and instead seeks to lead men and women to repentance through his goodness and forbearance (2:4). However, whoever despises this patience is storing up even more wrath for the day of wrath (2:5).

God's judgment is described as wholly righteous (*δικαιοκρισία* 2:5) and impartial: There is no *προσωποληψία* with God (2:11). Chapter 2 in particular gives the impression that everybody stands a fair chance to win God's favour.<sup>146</sup> God will hand out praise or punishment in a straightforward and symmetrical way (2:9-11) both to Jews and Greeks.

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<sup>142</sup> The possible complication that doing what is evil and refusing to honour God properly might lead to darkening of moral discernment (1: 21) is not followed up by Paul. Obviously even the present sinners, who already enter a world twisted by sin have full responsibility, not just a primordial generation of sinners.

<sup>143</sup> "Das dreifache *παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεός* markiert....den Umschlag von Schuld in Verhängnis" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 40).

<sup>144</sup> Concerning Romans 1:21 Käsemann says: "Zum vierten Male wird in unseren Versen nicht eine Möglichkeit, sondern die Tatsächlichkeit der Gotteskenntnis konstatiert. Darauf ruht die gesamte Argumentation" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 38). Similarly Horrell: "...people can be judged guilty *precisely and only* because they *knew* God's just decree (*τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιγινόντες*)" (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 249 and similarly 251, emphasis original).

<sup>145</sup> Horrell sees three ways in which the good and evil of the Torah reach humankind without the Torah: The law is written in people's hearts, they have the witness of the *συνείδησις* and their *λογισμοί* (2:15) defend or accuse (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 250).

<sup>146</sup> Jouette Bassler rightly observes that 1:18-2:29 does not yet contain a universal indictment of sinfulness, but rather prepares the way towards that verdict inasmuch as "...the fact of God's impartial justice over both Jews and Greeks is a necessary presupposition for the charge that all are under sin and accountable to God" (Bassler, *Impartiality*, 155).

Following on from this we can say:

- Paul seems to know and acknowledge a concept of universally accessible and known moral concepts, despite some variations in what Jews and non-Jews would see as sinful.
- Everybody, whether Jew or Greek, has sufficient knowledge of what is good and bad. Nobody has an excuse.
- Not knowing what is good and bad does not seem to be the problem that Christ is about to solve.
- God is going to judge the world and give praise to the one who does the good and punish the one who does the bad, regardless of their ethnic or religious background.
- Paul has a concept of rewarding the good and punishing the bad in a symmetrical fashion. I would like to call this approach ‘commonsensical.’<sup>147</sup> There is good and there is bad. God has set it forth and will at last mark it for what it is and deal with it accordingly.

#### 6.4.2.2 The Counter-Intuitive Approach to Good and Bad

##### a) Beyond symmetrical judgment

What is obviously striking is the fact that Paul does not seem to reckon with many people who actually are willing and able to fulfil what is good. Knowing good and bad seldom or never leads to the desired action. The climax of this pessimistic view is the cry in 3:12: οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ποιῶν χρηστότητα [οὐκ ἔστιν] ἕως ἐνός. Paul solemnly concludes that everybody is silenced and found guilty before God.

However, already in chapter 3 Paul seems to introduce a different approach which I would like to call ‘asymmetrical’ or ‘counter-intuitive’: God does not solely respond to good and evil, by dealing with it in a symmetrical way but by somehow embracing

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<sup>147</sup> I wish to use this term with its everyday, non-pejorative connotations, though it refers to what Campbell polemically calls “the principle of desert” (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 551).

and undermining evil by countering human badness with greater divine goodness. In 3: 3 Paul introduces the thought that God must remain faithful even or precisely in the face of human faithlessness.<sup>148</sup> God seems to have two strategies then, to respond to his being deprived of δόξα: One is his righteous and wrathful judgment, either straightaway or in the future. The other is the counter-acting of human faithlessness with faithfulness.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, human failure must serve to bring out even more brightly divine faithfulness, Paul seems to say in 3:4, obviously in tension to 2:24.

Paul then hints for the first time at the possibility that God might actually respond with goodness to evil, thus seemingly subverting the categories of good and evil.<sup>150</sup> What looks like a digression from God's original plan could be called a 'strategic intensification'.<sup>151</sup> If God's overall goal is not just to stand as the righteous judge but to see 'goodness' win the day, punishing evil might seem a high-risk business in a world full of sinful people. Symmetrical judgment under such conditions is prone to uproot and cut off bad people together with their actions. An intensified strategy of reaching out with goodness into the heartland of badness, so to speak, and to win it over for the good is more promising. At the same time this 'strategic intensification' carries its own risks of blurring the categories of good and bad. Paul is anxious to clarify that the content of good and evil has not changed and that God's goal is still the transformation of bad into good, as Paul points out in 2:4: ἀγνοῶν ὅτι τὸ χρηστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς μετάνοιαν σε ἄγει? God, though seemingly undermining the

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<sup>148</sup> The thought is triggered by Paul's reflections on the abiding prerogatives of Jews (3:1-3), a theme Paul will unfold much more in chps. 9-11. Paul "weist...Einwände gegen diese Gleichstellung von Juden und Heiden im Gericht im Blick auf die Gültigkeit der Erwählung Gottes zurück (3:1-8), auf die er ausführlich erst später eingehen wird (Röm 6f und 9-11)" (Wilckens, *Römer* 1-5, 93). "Paul's response in the following verses is to insist that impartiality does not annul the special privileges of the chosen people, a difficult position that he later tries to resolve in Chapters 9-11" (Bassler, *Impartiality*, 153).

<sup>149</sup> The rhetoric first turns to Jewish faithfulness and then broadens the paradigm, though not by showing up 'the Jew' as paradigmatic for sinful humanity (*contra* Käsemann, *Römer*, 50) but by seeing Jews as included in God's eschatological judgment. Wilckens points out well that for a Jewish hearer this is deeply problematic: "Ein Gott universalen Zorns kann nicht mehr ein Gott der Gerechtigkeit sein" (Wilckens, *Römer* 1-5, 168). Paul already begins to reshape fundamental notions of righteousness, wrath, covenant and election.

<sup>150</sup> Jonathan Linebaugh calls this phenomenon "diagonal Δικαιοσύνη", the "diagonal tangent of grace (χάρις, Rom 3:24), linking as it does the ungodly with justification..." (J. A. Linebaugh, 'Debating Diagonal Δικαιοσύνη' *Early Christianity* 1 [2010], 107-128 [128]). Contrasted with this is the "straight line of justice..., which links the wicked and curses" (ibid., 128), the eschatological "...reestablishment of a balanced, judicious correspondence between, on the one hand, righteousness and blessing (mercy), and on the other hand, wickedness and punishment (judgment)" (ibid., 117).

<sup>151</sup> An expression borrowed with gratitude from Prof. John Barclay.



categories of good and bad in a strategic move, will not abandon these categories altogether. How else is God going to judge the world? (3:6).

### **b) God's salvific outreach in Christ**

In 3:21-26 Paul gives a concentrated summary of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ: God puts Jesus forth as a ἱλαστήριον and justifies those who believe freely through his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (3:24). God's righteousness or integrity is again an important issue, which is affirmed and preserved (3:25, 26 [2x]). However, this is now granted to all who believe. While previous sections talked about God's righteousness and glory as a firm reality but necessarily turned against humanity under the conditions of sin, Romans 3: 21-26 speaks of God's righteousness that covers and reaches human beings, even sinners. In the previous sections Paul affirmed that God wins his battle of righteousness against a wayward humanity. Now he announces that God wins his battle of righteousness *for* humanity gone astray.<sup>152</sup> God's patience is mentioned in 3:25 - 26 (ἀνοχή in 3:26 echoes 2:4) most likely as his previous strategy until the eschatological νῦν. It already pointed to God's goodness before Christ but is clearly outshone by God's new outreach in Christ.<sup>153</sup> Similarly the theme of God's faithfulness, which preserved God's righteousness and glory in the face of human faithlessness already prepared the theme of 3:21-26 though not the theme of justification in the sense that the godless are covered by this divine righteousness.<sup>154</sup> Δικαιοσύνη and δικαιόω are reminiscent of the judicial images in 1:18 - 3:20<sup>155</sup> but are mentioned alongside cultic (ἱλαστήριον) and apocalyptic (ἀπολύτρωσις) vocabulary.<sup>156</sup> The precise mechanism of salvation and atonement is not

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<sup>152</sup> "...[Gott, D.B.] siegt im Endgericht über seine irdischen Widersacher und erweist sich in den Worten seiner Offenbarung als gerechtfertigt" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 76). I would not say though with Käsemann that "Rechtfertigung der Gottlosen meint Gottes Sieg über die Welt, die mit ihm streitet" (ibid., 77), but that it includes that victory. Justification goes beyond in that it makes those who are defeated the share-holders of divine victory.

<sup>153</sup> Cranfield points out that an infinite 'holding back' of God's judgment would be sensed as wanting in Jewish thinking – something final is needed (Cranfield, *Romans I*, 211-212).

<sup>154</sup> *Contra* Käsemann: "Der zweite Einwand [3:5, D.B.] wendet sich gegen die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 73).

<sup>155</sup> Campbell makes an interesting attempt to integrate traditional judicial connotations of δικαιοσύνη with proposals to read it as God's saving power or covenant faithfulness by introducing the concept of "forensic-liberative acts" (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 662, cf. also 702).

<sup>156</sup> Wilckens points to parallels in Exodus imagery (Wilckens, *Römer I-5*, 189). For a good summary of motifs and their possible inter-dependence cf. the diagram in Campbell, *Deliverance*, 655.

explained.<sup>157</sup> But the dynamic of God bursting forth and establishing something new is tangible.<sup>158</sup> Something genuinely new happens ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ (3:26) as Christ enters the scene. This still leaves open the question how the previously described symmetrical judgment- which was predominantly wrathful punishment under the conditions of sinful humanity- is connected to God's new deed in Christ. Does God's deed in Christ in a spectacular variation fulfil the commonsensical approach or does it overturn it and implicitly show it to be wanting?

Exponents of penal substitution would of course opt for the former by locating God's wrath and condemnation at the heart of the crucifixion: God exacts symmetric punishment in his salvific outreach, except that it is channelled away from sinful people onto Christ.<sup>159</sup> In this view it has been completely placated through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Equally the argument of Romans is seen as moving from plight (1:18-3:20) to solution. On the surface level of the textual, chronological development of Paul's argument this proposal does not look overly contrived.<sup>160</sup>

I suspect on the one hand Paul wants to have his counter-intuitive paradigm in place regardless of whether all people are really terrible sinners or not: The options for Abraham (who really is not the exemplary sinner at all in Jewish tradition!) are between χάρις and ὀφείλημα (4:4) which implicitly problematizes the latter, even if it could be done (cf. also 4:14). On the other hand Paul doubtless has a very pessimistic notion of sin: God precisely had to counter the commonsensical with something else because what was good had been hijacked and abused by the bad, namely sin and the flesh (7:13). The (potential) symmetry of good and bad, punishment and reward in the commonsensical approach is already completely out of sync: Even the best case, when a person knows what is good and wants with all of

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<sup>157</sup> For a good summary of the ἱλαστήριον debate cf. Wilckens, *Römer 1-5*, 190-193.

<sup>158</sup> "Mit νῦν δέ ist das Folgende als Antithese zum Voranstehenden markiert" (Wilckens, *Römer 1-5*, 184).

<sup>159</sup> Cf. e.g. the classical statement of penal substitution by L. Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1966).

<sup>160</sup> Even Campbell with his sharp protest against a Gospel that depends on a previously and independently established plight (cf. the diagrams in Campbell, *Deliverance*, 520) admits that "Romans 1-4 is the only text in Paul where the apostle arguably sets out a theological program that is overtly prospective and foundationalist..." (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 528). Campbell gets around this *skandalon* by attributing large sections of the chapters mentioned to an imagined Jewish interlocutor called the 'Teacher'.

his or her heart to follow it (as described in chapter 7) is undermined by the seemingly semi-autonomous actions of the flesh, which do what is bad.<sup>161</sup>

### c) The superabundant character of God's deed

God very strikingly does not set this situation straight again, by for instance giving people more moral strength or by wiping their slates clean of past sins.<sup>162</sup> Instead God sets out for the counter-strike in Christ by embracing (8:3) and undermining what is bad and thereby capturing it and transforming it into good. God in Christ reached out to what is opposed to God and even hostile to God (5:6, 8, 10) before there was any response to the better. The Adam-Christ chapter shows this very well: Christ is not just the positive mirror-image of Adam (though there are aspects of this) but there is a *περισσόν* in Christ's deed (*ἐπερίσσευσεν, ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν* 5:15,20), doing far more than amending the Adamic disobedience with Christ's obedience: *οὐχ ὥς τὸ παράπτωμα οὕτως καὶ τὸ χάρισμα* (5:15). The *ὀψώνια* of sin are contrasted with the *χάρισμα* of God (6:23). God in Christ reached out to what is opposed to God and even hostile to God (5:6, 8, 10).

There is something super-abundant, counter-intuitive (5:7!) and asymmetrical in God's deed in Christ.<sup>163</sup> Paul emphasizes this time and again: He describes it as 'life from the dead' (4:17).

Seen from a meta-perspective of Pauline rhetoric it makes good sense to see Paul as arguing from "solution to plight" to use Sanders' overused *bonmot*, rather than from a freestanding empirical analysis, though I have no doubt that Paul took the plight of sin for real.<sup>164</sup> Romans 11:32 seems to be a very

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<sup>161</sup> Good and bad vocabulary is especially frequent in 7:14-25. 'Good' is sometimes rendered as *ἀγαθός* sometimes as *καλός*.

<sup>162</sup> Paul insists that the Christian life is no longer *παλαιότητι γράμματος* (7:6). To use a metaphor we could say that according to Paul sin is playing in a Casino with people. It constantly outwits them and tricks them into bankruptcy. When people are in Christ they are not just resourced with an endless supply of money so that they can buy sin off, they have changed currency altogether and sin cannot enter the game anymore, because the new currency is meaningless to it.

<sup>163</sup> Watson aptly comments on the Adam-Christ-contrast in ch.5 that "[f]ar from merely counteracting Adam's action with a saving act that restores the disrupted status quo, the divine grace enacted in Jesus Christ is characterized by prodigality, extravagance, and excess. It goes far beyond what is needful and proper; it lacks economy and restraint" (Watson, *Paul, Judaism*, 274).

<sup>164</sup> It is unnecessary and unwarranted to shift the dire analysis of the human plight in 1:18-3:20 from Paul to his interlocutor, as Campbell wants it (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 528f.). Even if this passage is

strong summary and climax of Paul's argument and a powerful pointer to this meta-perspective. The "locking up into disobedience" is triggered by the salvific purpose ("so that he may have mercy upon all"). If this is correct, God's gracious intervention in Christ stands in a dialectical relationship to God's wrath but with a clear inner dynamic that strives towards salvation.<sup>165</sup> Put differently, God affirms the commonsensical approach by 'locking up' οἱ πάντες into disobedience, but with a view to overcoming symmetrical punishment altogether by 'having mercy'.<sup>166</sup> God's activities of symmetric punishment are already oriented towards the gracious action of God in Christ, they are already tilted towards the *ἰνα*.<sup>167</sup> But the action of mercy does not operate as the mirror-image of the action of locking up.<sup>168</sup>

#### d) God's love in Christ

The force behind God's salvific action is called 'love'. Paul uses the term sparsely but very effectively in 5:5; 5:8 and 8:35, 37, 39. In both chapters Paul assures his readers of the unfailing 'hope of glory' (5:2; 8:17, 24). Love is what motivated God and what becomes part of the innermost existence of the believers through the Spirit (5:5). If God has not just marked out and condemned evil and its perpetrators but somehow embraced, overcome and transformed the evil and especially the evil-

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made serviceable in a further rhetorical figure (e.g. to gain Jewish consent only to challenge it as false complacency, cf. Romans 2:1) and even if Paul deepens his understanding of sin from the wrong actions of a responsible subject to the power enslaving a helpless subject ("a condition more akin to slavery than to capacity" *ibid.*, 658; cf. 708-709, too) I cannot see Paul completely giving up his notion of human responsibility and divine judgment as, among other passages, Romans 13:1-7 makes clear.

<sup>165</sup> I feel encouraged in these observations by Moxnes who puts it aptly like this: "Even the destructive effect of the law, to bring wrath down upon them [the Jews], cannot escape the will of God to give salvation (4:16a). This is a theme which returns frequently in chapters 9-11 and reaches its paradoxical climax in 11:32..." (H. Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies of Paul's Understanding of God in Romans* [Leiden: Brill, 1980], 267) and by Wilckens: "In der Tat wird Paulus seine Rechtfertigungs-Erörterung so zusammenfassen, dass die heilsgeschichtliche 'Absicht' der Sünde aller die Offenbarung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes (3,21) als Herrschaftsantritt seiner Gnade (5,20f) und seines Erbarmens über alle Gottlosen ist (11,28-32)" (Wilckens, *Römer 1-5*, 165).

<sup>166</sup> Though I do not think that Paul ever discards the notion of God as judge as wanting, there is some truth in Flebbe's insightful perception that Paul seems to move from the picture of God the judge to God the potter, when he talks about the last motivational ground for God's merciful actions in Romans 9:6-33 (J. Flebbe, *Solus Deus: Untersuchungen zur Rede von Gott im Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 351; 352).

<sup>167</sup> Bassler, who repeatedly points out the twofold character of divine impartiality in Paul's thinking, which equally refers to God's judgment and to God's grace (e.g. Bassler, *Impartiality*, 156; 158; 166) pays probably not enough attention to the inner dynamic (*ἰνα*) of these two modes of impartiality.

<sup>168</sup> Campbell sees this aspect very clearly in his own idiosyncratic way. In that sense I fully agree with him that there is no organic or evolutionary processing from plight to solution. ("Works of law' ...do not precede faith, but follow it" (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 793).

doers, the whole reality is pregnant with hope for those who have been reached by this divine love: πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν (8:28). Just as sin took hold of what was holy and good, namely the law, God in Christ takes hold of the entire reality, good and evil, and brings it into line with God's ultimately good purposes.

#### e) **Summary**

Summing up these observations we can say:

- The problem is that Jews and Greeks are under sin. Nobody does what is good. Even the best God could offer, the law, has not improved the situation. God's instrument of good was captured and abused by sin and the flesh.
- In Jesus Christ God condemns the bad but not just that. The solution does not quite match the plight but matches the superabundant love and grace of God, which reaches out for weak and hostile human beings.
- God's mercy has something counter-intuitive and even morally repugnant: The godless are justified.
- This mercy and grace is the new paradigm of living out good and bad: not under the law but under grace.
- Good and bad as moral categories nevertheless do not cease to exist. They are firmly in place and are meant to be fulfilled, precisely in the new mode of the Spirit.
- Even so, good and bad have been re-arranged on the map of salvation. They are no longer matched by a symmetrical response of God. Instead the goodness of God has embraced and undermined the bad and has the potential to draw the bad/evil to the side of the good.
- Love is the force behind God's action in Christ. It gives assurance of future glory because it unites the believer with Christ and God, and connects every kind of hardship and suffering with salvation. The Christians live as the beloved of God, as sons, not slaves, without fear.

- Yoder and O'Donovan both share a sense that in God's Christological outreach something fundamentally new enters the scene of human history. O'Donovan talks about the liberating judgment rendered in Christ's death and resurrection. Yoder talks about the power of forgiving love as revealed in Christ. Love, mercy and forgiveness and a foretaste of eschatological peace are the fruits of salvation that are to mark the church.

### 6.4.2.3 Back to the Commonsensical Approach?

#### a) Fulfilling what is good

There is however an important qualification in this picture, which Paul is equally eager to point out as we have already seen. While God's asymmetric action gives ample reason for praise and hope it should never be used for calculated paradoxical behaviour in the field of ethics. To turn God's gracious action in Christ into a principle which can be exploited and which encourages doing the bad - “ποιήσωμεν τὰ κακὰ ἵνα ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀγαθὰ” (3:8) - is to be condemned. A similar suggestion in 6:1 meets with an equally shocked reaction on Paul's part. He spends considerable time in ch.6 spelling out the ethical consequences of the Christ event: To be under grace is to be under rule. To be affected by the death and resurrection of Christ leads to being identified with Christ and both aspects of his career. This must be translated into ethics: To be dead with Christ means to be dead to sin, to be alive in Christ means to be alive to God (6:11). Not to be under the law is not the same as ἀνομία which Paul contrasts with ἁγιασμός (6:19, 22). Even if the Christians must process their ethics through a completely different paradigm, the content of ethics seemingly does not change. Nor does the expectation and call to fulfil what is good.<sup>169</sup> Paul sums up both aspects in 8:4: The righteous commands of the law shall be fulfilled by those who walk according to the Spirit.

Perhaps it could be argued that the counter-intuitive paradigm contains within itself the ethical concerns of the commonsensical one.

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<sup>169</sup> Paul is confident that he will find the Roman Christians μεστοὶ ἀγαθωσύνης (15: 14). Even in his final admonitions Paul wants the believers to be ‘wise towards the good and innocent towards the bad’ (16:19).

## b) The Wrath of God

Another aspect of the commonsensical world view that stays in place is the notion of the coming ὀργή. This wrath, which was said to be blazing forth, not just against the sinful Gentiles (1:18) but possibly their Jewish counterparts has not then been dissolved.<sup>170</sup> As far as the condemning aspect of judgment is concerned (the κρίμα...εἰς κατάκριμα as Paul puts it in 5:16, cf. a similar proximity between κρινεῖν and κατακρινεῖν in Romans 2:1) there is no room for it after God's action in Christ: There is no κατάκριμα for those in Christ (8:1; cp. also 8:34). Christ will surely save them from the ὀργή to come (5:9).<sup>171</sup> This last statement is interesting, because though the believers are *de facto* safe from it, the wrath is not overcome in a conceptual sense.<sup>172</sup> It is still to be expected and the Christians need salvation from it in the future.<sup>173</sup>

It seems that God has an “orbit” of judging and condemning activities that circle around his core activities “in Christ” though the latter are where the weight of God's intentions lies and towards which everything is oriented and flows.

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<sup>170</sup> Pace Wilckens who emphasizes that the age of wrath is over (Wilckens, *Römer 1-5*, 185). Wilckens admits that Paul speaks in the language of apocalyptic tradition in 5: 9, where the righteous are saved from wrathful judgment but rejects the view that God's wrath is averted in Christ here. He is of course right in emphasizing the identity of judge-saviour and the simultaneous act of putting sinners under wrath and grace (ibid., 297). However, he downplays too much the abiding reality - at least conceptually - of God's wrath.

<sup>171</sup> I agree with Campbell that according to Paul “...Christians need not fear the wrath of God at the end of the age- indeed, far from it.” (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 608). But it should be noted that Paul does not make an absolute statement such as “[t]his is a God of love, not a God of punishment” (ibid., 608).

<sup>172</sup> Campbell very tellingly avoids associating the ὀργή directly with God and instead talks about the “eschatological wrath and its associated apocalyptic forces” (Campbell, *Deliverance*, 606). While it is true that Paul somewhat depersonalizes the wrath here, it is equally clear from previous chapters that this must be the wrath of God. If that concept is just a questionable theological invention of the ‘Teacher’ (ibid., 706) it is not clear what it is doing here when Paul sets off to narrate God's gracious intervention in Christ in his own words.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. 1 Thess. 1:10.

### 6.4.3 ‘Good’, ‘Bad’ and ‘Love’ in Romans 12 and 13

#### 6.4.3.1 Living as the Beloved of God (Romans 12)

##### a) Hating evil, clinging to what is good

Good and bad are important words in Romans 12 and are rendered with ἀγαθόν, εὐάρεστον, τέλειον, καλόν on the one hand and πονερόν, κακόν on the other. God’s will is characterized as what is good, well-pleasing and perfect (12:2b). At first glance this sounds as if God’s will is defined by some good that is universally perceived as such. However, the context makes it clear that only the renewed minds that are explicitly not conformed τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ (2a) are able to discern the good as characterizing God’s will. The thus perceived ‘good’ seems to be applied foremost in the realm of the church as the following verses (3-8) suggest. v.9 sounds like a summary maxim, demanding ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος and admonishing the Christians to detest evil (πονερόν) and cling to what is good (ἀγαθόν). There has been some debate to what extent ἀγάπη dominates chapter 12.<sup>174</sup> It seems that ἀγάπη is on a different level than ‘good’ and ‘bad’, though closely connected to the latter categories.<sup>175</sup> Following Paul’s remarks in Romans so far it seems to be as much or more an empowering divine presence than a single virtue (Romans 5:8). As such it reaches the believers from outside (ἀγάπη is only used of God or Christ before Romans 12:9), yet becomes part of them at the deepest existential level (5:5). Because of that their relationships will be marked by love, including the one to God (8:28). But love is not the new super-virtue that either replaces or contains all other commands and definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’.<sup>176</sup> Rather, love as the driving force of Christian deeds

<sup>174</sup> Käsemann has some serious misgivings about taking ‘love’ as the all-pervasive subject of Romans 12, though he later on almost withdraws his critique (Käsemann, *Römer*, 331, 337). By contrast Black finds the question misguided and claims that “...there is no real distinction between love and good works...” and that love is indeed the theme of chapter 12 (D. A. Black, ‘The Pauline Love Command: Structure, Style, and Ethics in Romans 12:9-21’ in *EFN* 2.1 (1989), 3-22 (20).

<sup>175</sup> For a helpful brief discussion of the tension between concrete commands and one principle of love cf. Horrell, *Solidarity*, 12-14.

<sup>176</sup> Summed up by Lyonnet as “...pour Paul, l’amour n’est pas seulement le ‘sommet’ de la loi, le premier des commandements, leur ‘tête’, mais...il les contient tous” (S. Lyonnet, ‘La Charité plénitude de la Loi’ in C.K. Barrett et al., eds., *Dimensions de la Vie Chrétienne (Rm 12-13)* (Rome: Abbaye de S. Paul, 1979), 151-178 (156).



and the overall horizon of hope still needs concretisation in individual commands.<sup>177</sup>

It relates to the known categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and deals with them in a certain way, affirming, prioritizing, intensifying or perhaps relativizing them.<sup>178</sup>

Romans 12:9 supports this notion by standing out as a maxim to which a string of admonitions in participle clauses is attached in v.9b to 13, though v.11 and 12 do not quite fit this headline in terms of content.<sup>179</sup> Ἀποστυγοῦντες τὸ πονηρὸν and κολλώμενοι τῷ ἀγαθῷ can be seen as two separate maxims following the love command with a similarly generalized content. I prefer to take it as a first concretisation of love: Ἀγάπη still knows how to tell good from bad and it should do so most energetically.<sup>180</sup>

We could argue that in v. 9 Paul correlates ἀγάπη with something that has again a ring of the ‘commonsensical’: Good and bad can be discerned and distinguished from each other and the normal and upright moral answer is to ‘detest evil’ and ‘cling to what is good’.

#### **b) Overcoming evil with good**

Ἀγαπ\* vocabulary makes an appearance again in v.19, though it should be noted that it is not ἀγάπη that is mentioned (see below, 6.4.4.3.b). The believers as the ἀγαπητοί should not take revenge. The theme of hostility, harassment and the Christian response to it has been built up from v.14 on and is rightly seen as summed up in v.21: The believers are called not to be overcome by the bad but to overcome the bad

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<sup>177</sup> “...ἀγάπη is not strictly definable, and neither here [Romans 12] nor in 1 Corinthians 13 does the apostle attempt to give a logically exact or exhaustive description of it. Instead, in both passages Paul emphasizes the importance of love as the guiding power in the church’s life and ministry. Paul therefore offers several concrete instances of love at work” (Black, ‘Love Command’, 15).

<sup>178</sup> I find Horrell’s notion of love (or ‘other-regard’ as he prefers to put it) as a ‘meta-norm’ that helps to shape, negotiate and navigate through specific moral norms very helpful (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 201, 242).

<sup>179</sup> Engberg-Pedersen sees v.9a as a “genuine Pauline bridge” both summing up the previous instructions and pointing forward (T. Engberg-Pedersen, ‘Paul’s Stoicizing Politics in Romans 12-13: The Role of 13.1-10 in the Argument’ *JSNT* 29 (2006), 163- 172 (165)). I agree with the author that the mentioning of love “summarizes and bring into the open the essential character of the forms of *in-group* behaviour he has been describing from the very beginning of the chapter.” It is less clear to me whether Paul starts a new enumeration that is “*completely* focused on in-group relationships...” (ibid., 165, my emphasis).

<sup>180</sup> I do not think that the verses 10-21 can be subsumed either under “cling to what is good” (12:10-13 and 12:15-16a and 13:1-7) or “detest what is evil” (12:16b-c and 12:17-21) as Kuo-Wei Peng suggests (K.-W. Peng, *Hate the Evil, Hold Fast to the Good: Structuring Romans 12.1-15.13* (Library of New Testament Studies 300; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 63.

through the good. This could well mean that people should not be discouraged by their own bad tendencies but overcome them by pursuing the good all the more energetically.<sup>181</sup> However, in the context it is clear that this maxim sums up actions which pursue acts of kindness, peace and non-retaliation when faced with animosities and wrong-doing from others. There is something more counter-intuitive in this second maxim, which still does not rule out but reframe the commonsensical maxim in v. 9. After all, ‘Hate what is evil’ could easily develop into ‘detest the evildoer.’ Does Paul advocate some form of enemy love then? It has been widely noted that Paul’s command in v. 14 is strongly reminiscent of Jesus’ command to love or bless one’s enemy or persecutors.<sup>182</sup> However, Paul does not give the impartial kindness of the heavenly father (Matthew 5:44) as the rationale for this striking behaviour, nor the love of God reaching out to his enemies (Rom 5:8). The Christians alone are addressed as the ‘beloved’ (v.19). This as well as the νίκη vocabulary may remind them of Romans 8:37 and encourage them to persevere in their counter-intuitive actions, knowing that their needs are taken care of and that God can use anything in service for the good (Romans 8: 28).<sup>183</sup> However, the Roman Christians are not told to give room to the love of God or Christ but to the ὀργή of God. After the φιλαδελφία of v. 10 and the φιλοξενία of v.13 there is no explicit vocabulary to speak about love or kindness for the enemy, though the respective deeds surely have this connotation.<sup>184</sup> The quotation about the “fiery coals” in v. 20 has generated a lot of exegetical discussion.<sup>185</sup> Even if the overall purpose is to lead to the repentance of the perpetrator the emphasis seems to be on exposing the evil-doer rather than absorbing and covering up his or her deeds.<sup>186</sup> This

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<sup>181</sup> Cranfield refers to Bengel, who renders κακοῦ with ‘hostis tui, et naturae tuae’ (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 650).

<sup>182</sup> “In Röm 12,14 entspricht τοὺς διώκοντας ὑμᾶς Mt 5,44b, εὐλογεῖτε dagegen Lk 6,28” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 22).

<sup>183</sup> Jewett ponders extensively both the reason for the sudden ἀγαπητοί (Jewett, *Romans*, 774-775) and νικῶ/νίκα and their possible polemical reference to the goddess Nike/Viktoria (ibid., 778-779). Neither he nor the literature he quotes make the connection with Rom 8:37.

<sup>184</sup> Thorsteinsson rightly insists on this remarkable feature which is often downplayed or ignored by Christian exegetes. “There is no ‘love of enemies’ witnessed in this verse” (R. M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010] 193). Also cf. ibid., 166-175 (‘Non-Retaliation and love of enemy’).

<sup>185</sup> For a brief discussion about the coals as either a sign of repentance or of judgment see Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 26.

<sup>186</sup> Pace Wilckens, who is convinced that v.20 has to “...weil mit ἀλλά eingeführt, etwas Positives im Blick auf das Geschick des Feindes bedeuten, nämlich dass er dem Zorngericht entgeht, weil der

is not to diminish the force of Paul's ethical appeal.<sup>187</sup> However, it seems to be of some importance to note that the counter-intuitive strand does not dominate the picture throughout vv. 17-21. It would be easy to make an appeal to Christ's suffering and dying for his enemies, similar to the one in 15:3 or 14:15. Does Paul primarily appeal to the example of Christ when there are inner-Christian problems to be tackled?<sup>188</sup>

V. 17b, *προνοούμενοι καλὰ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων* suggests once more that there is considerable similarity if not sameness in what believers and outsiders perceive as good. Wilckens suggests that the phrase must be understood as describing the good deeds believers render to other people. However, this solution is not convincing.<sup>189</sup> Even if the context talks about deeds of kindness rendered to others, the *ἐνώπιον* seems to suggest that what the Christians do is perceived by outsiders, too, as something good and had better be perceived in that way.<sup>190</sup> This does not yet suggest that the believers are people pleasers or take their ethical directions from outsiders. But it is an important reminder that God's will and the public view of good and bad

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Christ so auf seine Bosheit reagiert, wie Gott in Christus auf die Sünde seiner Feinde reagiert hat (5,8)" (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 26).

<sup>187</sup> Pace Thorsteinsson, who claims that Paul "...has some afterthoughts regarding the degree and nature of this forgiveness" (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 170). The admonition for forgiveness or rather non-retaliation and a kind response to hostile people is not qualified or minimized by Paul but backed up by the reference to vengeance as God's prerogative. True, it is not problematized by Paul that God engages in an activity, which has just been deemed morally questionable on the part of human beings. In contrast with this are Stoic sentiments, which reject the very thought of divine revenge (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 171). But the important thing is that for Paul (future) divine vengeance must lead human beings to suspend theirs to the point of blessing their persecutors. 'Giving room to the wrath of God' taken by itself could well include the possibility for the victims of injustice to curse their tormentors and thus invoke divine vengeance, something that is clearly precluded by Paul's previous words. In that sense Thorsteinsson puts Paul's words somewhat unfairly in contrast with Seneca's "Pessime cum eo agis, cui vis a dis noceri" (ibid., 172, Seneca, *Ben.* 6.27.5). Having said that it has to be admitted that there is a curious tension in Paul's admonition: The practice of non-retaliation is rooted in God's love in Christ and at the same time sustained by the hope for future divine revenge. I do not exclude that treading this complex path Christians can be led to indulge in phantasies of destruction of their opponents despite the admonitions to the contrary.

<sup>188</sup> Wilckens notices, too, that there is hardly a reference to Christology in this section. He assures us that we have to presuppose this basis (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 27, n. 131). While I agree that Paul addresses the Roman believers as the beloved, meaning the beloved of God in Christ, it seems to be noteworthy at least that their activity towards opponents is not called love.

<sup>189</sup> For other scholars backing the meaning "in the sight of all" cf. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 748 and Horrell, *Solidarity*, 266-267.

<sup>190</sup> Contra Cranfield, who claims that the good the believers are to strive for in the sight of all is not "a moral *communis sensus* of mankind, but the gospel" (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 646).

may coincide at times and human evaluations cannot just be brushed aside by claiming to act in God's name.<sup>191</sup>

### 6.4.3.2 Summary

Summing up our observations so far we could say the following:

- Good and bad seem to be again self-evident in one respect as something shared by all human beings. The Christians are not to invent new definitions or stand good and bad on their head.
- On the other hand it is only the transformed mind that correctly perceives the will of God and hence the good (v.2).
- On the one hand the Christians are called to give a wholehearted and straightforward ethical response to what is perceived as good and bad (v.9). On the other hand the 'detesting of evil' is not followed up particularly. The maxim to detest evil is not turned against the evil-doer.
- On the contrary, there is a complementary thought which focuses on the good that overcomes the bad. This is not a new Christian definition of the contents of 'good' and 'bad' but a new *strategy* for how to deal with good and bad.<sup>192</sup> This new strategy refuses to pay back good and bad in a symmetrical and straightforward matter, where the response matches the deed. Instead the believers are called to focus resolutely on what is good. 'Good' carries more weight than 'bad' in this paradigm. Answering bad deeds with goodness is therefore no surrender to evil. On the contrary, to pay back evil with evil is in one sense giving in to evil. Responding to bad actions with good ones on the other hand has the promise of undermining and overcoming what is bad.

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<sup>191</sup> This is precisely Paul's concern in 2 Cor 8:21, strangely quoted by Wilckens to back up his case (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 24) and possibly Rom 14:18 (εὐάρεστος τῷ θεῷ καὶ δόκιμος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις), which is not quoted by Wilckens.

<sup>192</sup> 'New' refers to the development of the text here and is not used to make excessive claims of uniqueness about the Pauline ethics of non-retaliation. Thorsteinsson lists a number of remarkable Stoic texts which advocate at least the principle of overcoming bad with good (cf. the examples given of Seneca, Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 29), of showing kindness to enemies (Musonius 41.136, Seneca, *Otio* 1.4) and in one example by Epictetus (*Diss.* 3.22.54) even of *loving* one's tormentor (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 173).

- Reading Romans 12:20 in the context of the wider letter it is not far-fetched to be reminded of God's own strategic offensive in Jesus Christ, which also reached out with good into the realm of bad and thereby overcame it. This strategy is inspired and sustained by love.
- Paul therefore reminds the Roman believers of their existence as the 'beloved of God'.<sup>193</sup> Responding with acts of kindness to hostile people is for the believers one way of spelling out and mirroring this central identity as the beloved of God. However, Paul is reluctant to use the term ἀγάπη to characterize the deed in addition to the doer.<sup>194</sup> What has reached the believers in Christ is not exactly what they are to offer their enemies, though the former experience must shape interactions not least with hostile parties. Love may be the appropriate term to describe relationships in the church because, just as Christ is the precise location where God's love becomes uniquely manifest, the church is the location where it will be unlocked and experienced in its fullest, mutual dynamic.<sup>195</sup>
- Where not all the parties involved are located in this new space and new reality something more modest has to be pursued such as μετὰ πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰρηνεύοντες (Romans 12:18). This has certainly the goal to "try to

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<sup>193</sup> This is in my view Paul's unique contribution to the idea of non-retaliation: God himself is pictured as somebody who loves his enemies in a most costly and painful form. It is very strange that Paul does not exploit this startling thought more in his ethical admonitions towards outsiders. There is a parallel phenomenon in the Gospel of John in that God is famously described as 'having loved the world' (John 3:16) but the Christian believers are never told to love the world or any outsiders for that matter.

<sup>194</sup> While I agree with Engberg-Pedersen that when Paul "...goes on to speak of relations outside the group (in 12:17-21), he employs a different terminology..." I find it misleading to state that the terminology used in relations with outsiders "... focuses on the basic contrast between good (ἀγαθόν) and bad (κάκον), that is, on what is *objectively* good or bad behaviour with no implication that it springs from the *subjective* motivation of ἀγάπη" (Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicizing Politics', 166). I do not find 'objective' and 'subjective' helpful categories in this context. The Christians share a broad perception of good and bad with their environment. Their behaviour is always motivated and sustained by love, though the context and emphasis varies: There is mutual love in the church, there is whole-hearted choosing of good and rejecting what is bad by every individual believer and there is the subtle strategy of answering evil with good, imitating God's outreach in Christ.

<sup>195</sup> I prefer the term 'location' to Thorsteinsson's statement that "the moral teaching of Roman Christianity" is being "*conditioned* by adherence to a particular religion" (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 206, my emphasis). Paul's primary goal is not to restrict love and kindness to a circle of co-religionists but the conviction that love is made possible in the first place by God's action in Christ.

avoid unnecessary conflict with the outside world.”<sup>196</sup> It has to be noted though, that peace, too, is an eschatological good for Paul (5:1, 14:17) overcoming the hopeless state summed up in Romans 3:17.

- The eschatological gifts of love and peace are thus seen as located within Christ and the body of Christ. However, as Paul’s formulations show well these gifts cannot be seen as tightly contained to this realm. There is a certain ‘spilling over’ or ‘seeping through’ quality inherent to them.<sup>197</sup> This is something to be welcomed and to be followed up not to be deplored. Still, Paul does not encourage or advocate love for humanity or love for one’s enemy. There is no space here to follow up, whether this diversified or layered model of love/kindness is wanting over against more straightforward universal ones<sup>198</sup> or whether it has perhaps an ingenuity of its own. Paul clearly has a double-strategy of keeping the believers’ focus on the church while paying some attention to the outside world, too.<sup>199</sup>
- More importantly, there is a seeming double-bind or dialectical structure at quite another level: While the Christians, God’s beloved (cf. Rom. 1:7) should meet each other in sincere love and seek peace with all people (v.18), as far as God is concerned, he is portrayed as the guarantor of justice, who will mark good and bad for what they are (especially the bad) and bring his wrath to bear upon it.
- For Yoder and his interpreters Romans 12, especially from v.14 on and the stunning culmination of v. 21 is a very important *Magna Carta* for the life of the Christ believers. The whole chapter spells out the consequences of God’s abundance of grace and mercy for the interactions of believers. Yoder would emphasize that the text speaks of love of enemies. He would emphasize the

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<sup>196</sup> Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 193.

<sup>197</sup> Wilckens gives a number of examples from early Jewish sources where there is a similar openness and fluidity of formulation between loving the fellow Jew and the outsider (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 25.26).

<sup>198</sup> This is clearly Thorsteinsson’s view, cf. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 190-206 (‘Ethical Scope Compared’).

<sup>199</sup> Similarly Wilckens: “Die Liebe gilt grundsätzlich jedem Nächsten wie 13, 8-10 zeigt. Doch innerhalb der Gemeinde hat sie als Bruderliebe (φιλαδελφία) ihren zentralen Ort in der Welt” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 20).

‘spilling over’ and ‘seeping through’ effect much more than Paul does. The church’s testimony to the world is precisely its love for hostile people, following the example of Christ. Yoder and the tradition following him would set up Romans 12 in sharp contrast to Romans 13:1-7: The practices of the church are very different from the practices of the authorities. Because Christ is God’s final revelation, the church’s practices show up the activities of the authorities as deeply wanting. Paul’s appeal to God as the final ‘avenger’ in 12:19 sits uneasily with this vision.

## 6.4.4 Reassurance for Those Who Do ‘Good’: Romans 13

### 6.4.4.1 Servants of God – Imitators of the Judge

This last observation is especially meaningful when we move on to Romans 13 now. This straightforward or ‘commonsensical’ attitude to good and bad is mirrored by the authorities.<sup>200</sup> Romans 13:4 repeats key vocabulary from 12:19 such as ὁργή and ἐκδίκησις/ἐκδικος. It has been suggested that this makes the authorities look like God’s direct executors and their judgments as somewhat proleptic of God’s.<sup>201</sup> However, God’s future wrath and the present wrath of the authorities are not immediately drawn together.<sup>202</sup> Paul does not suggest to the harassed Christians that they make an appeal to the political authorities or to go to court, and it is an open question whether doing so would still qualify as ‘overcoming evil by good.’<sup>203</sup> The crucial point lies in the fact that the authorities embody and imitate God’s commonsensical approach to good and evil. They may not reflect the counter-

<sup>200</sup> Link speaks of the “Gleichnisfähigkeit” of the state (Link, ‘Anfragen’, 445).

<sup>201</sup> “That is (partly) how God chooses to punish evildoers *before* the arrival of the day of judgment, i.e. through the Roman authorities” (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 171).

<sup>202</sup> “...it may go too far to suggest that...the governing authorities are on the side of Christians to punish those who persecute them” (Peng, *Hate Evil*, 107). *Contra* Webster, who suggest that Paul commends the authorities as being “...on their side against their enemies...” while the latter are identified as Jewish militants. (A.F.C. Webster, ‘St Paul’s Political Advice to the Haughty Gentile Christians in Rome: An Exegesis of Romans 13:1-7’, *St Vladimirs Theological Quarterly* 25 (1981), 259-282 (279, 282).

<sup>203</sup> Wright suggests that Paul warns against forms of lynch justice: “The excitable little groups of Christians should not take the law in their own hands in advance” (Wright, ‘Romans’, 719). Oakes however reminds us (without engaging with Wright at that point), that the line between vengeance, self-defence and lynch justice were not as clearly drawn as in our societies not least because justice was not as readily available for everybody. Paul might have asked from the believers in Rome to renounce their ordinary strategies of group-based self-defence against violent attackers in a pretty lawless setting (Cf. Oakes, *Romans in Pompeii*, 123-126).

intuitive approach that the Christians are taught to embody, but they are not against God for that matter. On the contrary, they are God's servants, judging evil and condemning it and praising good. This seems to be completely unproblematic for Paul. After our *tour d'horizon* through Romans it is clear why. Even after God's deeply counter-intuitive, uprooting and paradoxical approach to good and evil in Christ, the moral structure of the universe stays firmly in place and judgment is to be expected. That the pagan authorities seem to be able so effortlessly not only to discern but also to punish and reward good and bad is rather astonishing after Romans 1-3 and the negative conclusion that there is 'none who does good' (3:12).<sup>204</sup> Paul does not explain how this is possible. He does not say that the authorities are good people or even that they engage in good actions. But the position they take towards good and evil is εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν (13:4). The focus is not on individuals, who of all people have learnt to master their bad impulses and lead lives that are pleasing to God, but on something like 'category people',<sup>205</sup> who fulfil a role that corresponds to a central activity of God and may well further the divine will.<sup>206</sup> In terms of content "Paul...implies here that God and the Roman authorities have corresponding views of what counts as 'good', τὸ ἀγαθόν and what counts as 'bad', τὸ κακόν."<sup>207</sup> The seriously wicked acts of violence, of immorality, of damaging one's fellow citizens' possessions or health, or breeching his/her trust may come to mind as listed by Paul in 2:21-24. Though Paul knows that the authorities will of course not punish things such as idolatry, which equally provokes the divine wrath, the shared notion of good and bad seems to be still broad enough to inspire confidence in the authorities' task. It may well be that Paul tacitly assumes that what is to be shunned as evil and clung to as good by the Christians will look different in some respects from what the authorities prosecute as evil and praise as good. But this

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. Link's puzzlement at 13:4 given Paul's verdict in 3:12 and his protest against identifying 'the good' with some bourgeois decency (Link, 'Anfragen', 445).

<sup>205</sup> Käsemann points out well how the authorities are more on the personal than on the institutional side. Paul does not deal with the 'state as such' but with its personified exponents, "...jene[r] Kreis von Machtträgern, mit denen der kleine Mann in Berührung kommen kann...." (Käsemann, *Römer*, 342). But he rightly doubts the conclusion that the authorities can be loved or can claim love (ibid., 340).

<sup>206</sup> In a sense the authorities are of course "a particular group of outsiders..." (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 98), but at the same time they are on a different plane from neighbours, friends, strangers and enemies, where interactions happen at a more personal and direct level.

<sup>207</sup> Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 98. Similarly Horrell: "...in so acting as God's representative, the ruling power is presumed to share God's sense of good and evil" (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 256). To distinguish "moralische Qualitäten" from "politische[m] Wohlverhalten" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 341) is artificial.



does not seem to damage his argument. Likewise Paul naturally assumes that there are better and worse people and that the authorities can distinguish between them. Not everybody is in hopeless sin – not as far as the authorities are concerned, that is. Again, things may look different from God’s perspective. As far as the ‘good’ of the authorities is concerned it is mostly expressed in negative terms. Despite the phrases ἐξείς ἐπαλινον (13:3) and σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν (13:4) the emphasis is on fear and punishment in v.3-4, even when expressed in a negation.<sup>208</sup> Obviously the authorities are mostly busy with ‘hating what is evil.’ Paul does not give any more suggestions what their task may more positively consist in.

#### 6.4.4.2 Cooperating with Those Who Are ‘for your Good’

The authorities then, perform something good, as is becoming of their role as servants of God. They do so precisely by revenging and punishing evil and to a lesser degree by affirming what is good. This can well be reassuring for the small group of Christians in Rome. Even if Paul does not say that the authorities are on the Christians’ side over against their ‘enemies’ he may want to emphasize that the church members have nothing to fear from them. This could be particularly important after tackling opposition and animosities in 12:14, 16-21. Though it is difficult to say to what degree Romans 12:14-21 speaks of harassment and opposition for the sake of the new faith of the Roman Christians, the expression τοὺς διώκοντας (12:14) certainly points in this direction. The tension and strain are tangible. Paul has moved from exhortations which concern the inner-Christian relationships to questions of how to deal with all people (possibly v.15 and certainly v.17 and 18) and in particular with hostile people (v.14, perhaps v.vv.18, certainly 19-20). It does not seem unnatural for Paul to move on to the authorities, not so much in order to complete an imaginary catalogue of ‘all sorts of people’ but rather to discuss what the Christians in their fragile situation have to give to and expect from representatives of the state. Paul’s evaluation is positive: Just as the Christians can rightly expect God to judge the world through his righteous wrath, they can be assured that the political authorities work in the same direction. While in the case of

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<sup>208</sup> Οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος (13:3); μὴ φοβεῖσθαι (13:3); φοβοῦ (13:4); τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ (13:4); ἐκδικος εἰς ὀργήν (13:4).

personal opponents the Christians were admonished to overcome the bad through the good, in Romans 13:1-7 they are now called to cooperate with the good through the good.<sup>209</sup>

We have already discussed what the authorities' 'good' may consist in. What is the 'good work' then of the Christians? It may be seen on the one hand as consisting concretely in the payment of taxes and other dues.<sup>210</sup> In that case the statements about the 'good work' (v.3) or the evil-doer (v.4) would specifically talk about the problem of paying or withholding taxes and the related punishment.<sup>211</sup> This is a possibility, which has of course the concrete examples going for it. I think however that the expressions 'good' and 'bad' seem to be rather too general to be used with such a narrow application only.<sup>212</sup> Van Unnik has shown that these contrasting terms or similar ones are frequently mentioned together in Hellenistic sources and refer mostly to (not) living in accordance with the law and the corresponding reactions of praise/honour or punishment by the authorities.<sup>213</sup>

It seems most likely that Paul weaves two threads of thinking into the passage: On the one hand, political authorities must be given their due as the servants of God who work for the 'good'.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand the Christian practice of 'clinging to the good' will ensure that they can live without fear before the authorities. The tone is, again, on reassurance.<sup>215</sup> I think that Romans 13:8-11 confirms this impression:

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<sup>209</sup> Engberg-Pederson says "believers should 'conquer the bad (τὸ κακόν)' by means of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν)' (12.21): *in* so doing, they should be subjected to the powers of this world since these, on their side, represent God and in themselves support behaviour that is good (13.1ff)" (Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicizing Politics', 168). I agree that the types of actions commended in Romans 12:21 and Romans 13:1-7 are closely related by a shared notion of 'the good' but it is important to see that they are also differentiated: The authorities represent one aspect of God's character and office, the Christian believers are called to embody another feature of God's character as revealed in Christ.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. Peng, *Hate Evil*, 97.

<sup>211</sup> This is advocated by Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, based on their meticulous study of vocabulary (Friedrich-Pöhlmann-Stuhlmacher, 'Historische Situation', 144; 157-159).

<sup>212</sup> I am not sure either how likely it is to assume that the dutiful tax-payer gets 'praise' for what is just expected.

<sup>213</sup> W.C. van Unnik, 'Lob und Strafe durch die Obrigkeit: Hellenistisches zu Römer 13, 3-4' in Ellis-Grässer, E., *Jesus und Paulus*, 334-343.

<sup>214</sup> Käsemann states soberly that 'the good' here is "...faktisch kaum mehr als Schutz vor Übergriffen" (Käsemann, *Römer*, 345).

<sup>215</sup> Elliott is right in highlighting a certain ambiguity between reassurance and threats: "And why should the proper subjects of any such benign authorities need to be reminded of the threat of the sword (13:4)?" (Elliott, 'Romans 13:1-7', 197). But this does not betray the fact that Paul's view of the authorities is considerably darker than a surface reading suggests. Paul, even in his 'carrot and stick' rhetoric consistently points to the same things: The authorities are good (that includes their

### 6.4.4.3 Those who Love Have Nothing to Fear

#### a) Love as fulfilment

In v. 8 Paul sums up his previous command by demanding that nobody should fail to give their due to anybody. The clause following immediately afterwards, εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν, is slightly enigmatic. It is probably not meant that the Roman Christians should fail to perform their duty of loving each other. Rather love is introduced as something which does not fit the ‘due’ category altogether.<sup>216</sup> Love like grace belongs on the side of the superabundant and asymmetric, which cannot neatly be given back as one’s duty.<sup>217</sup> The ἀλλήλους indicates that Paul wants to return to inner-Christian matters after his excursus about the political authorities. The half-verse could then be read as Paul’s moving on to higher ethical grounds, spelling out the pattern of love in the church. Paul rounds off his command with a supporting reflection: Who loves τὸν ἕτερον has fulfilled the law. The mentioning of the law is somewhat surprising at this stage and seems to pick up discussions much earlier in the letter. Law was not mentioned in the brief discussion of political authority. The examples from the Decalogue in v.9a and the Leviticus quotation in 9c indicate that Paul has the Torah in mind rather than Roman law, which would of course be in keeping with his earlier use of the term. Paul affirms again that the new Christian existence in the Spirit fulfils the law (cf. Rom 8:4) because it is an existence lived in love. The new spiritual reality the Christian believers find themselves in cannot be grasped in categories of law or duty but are nevertheless not opposed to what the (Jewish) law and duty command.

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punishing of the bad) and those who do good both submit to them in rendering their due and having nothing to fear.

<sup>216</sup> *Contra* Wilckens, who does not want love to be something that is sharply distinguished from ‘rendering one’s due’ and sees the meaning of the sentence in a broadening of Christian love to encompass all people. (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 67).

<sup>217</sup>“...the point....will be that the debt of love, unlike those debts which we can pay up fully and be done with, is an unlimited debt which we can never be done with discharging” (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 674). “Die Agape...ist...ein debitum immortale (Bengel), mit welchem man anders als bei rechtlichen Auflagen niemals fertig wird”(Käsemann, *Römer*, 348).

## b) Who is to be loved?

But who exactly is to be loved? Thorsteinsson makes a passionate and mostly compelling case that Paul never uses ἀγάπη for outsiders.<sup>218</sup> Still, this does not completely rule out a different use in Romans 13:8. The terms ὁ ἕτερος and ὁ πλήσιος (13:8, 9) refer to the fellow Israelite in their original context and can be used by Paul to refer to the fellow-believer.<sup>219</sup> But they still seem to be more comprehensive terms than ἀδελφός, ἀγαπητός or ἅγιος, Paul's preferred terms to address and admonish the Christian believers.<sup>220</sup> However, what is even more striking is Paul's description and presentation of love in this context. Love, which was introduced as the *debitum immortale* is now portrayed rather as a mere principle of doing no harm.<sup>221</sup> The 'goodness' of the Christian lifestyle is given the shape of 'doing nothing bad'.<sup>222</sup> The examples given from the Decalogue probably prohibit things that were widely seen as negative.<sup>223</sup> All this is certainly a pale reflection of what Paul says about love elsewhere in Romans.<sup>224</sup> Whereas 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 has a roughly equal number of negative and positive characterizations of ἀγάπη we

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<sup>218</sup> Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 194-198. Thorsteinsson's attempt to prove that to love is reserved for fellow believers because the term ἀγάπῃ originally denotes preference is odd, though (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 194, n. 18). Horrell, who goes through the same passage is more optimistic in judging that Paul wants not just goodness but love to be shown to all, meaning outsiders, too. (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 262-263).

<sup>219</sup> Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 194, discussing Gal.5:14. Ὁ ἕτερός is not mentioned in Gal.5:14.

<sup>220</sup> Cranfield furthermore suggests that "[t]he definite article before 'other' is important-it has a generalizing effect" (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 676). For the address ἀδελφοί and other insider-addresses cf. Horrell's brief discussion in Horrell, *Solidarity*, 111-115).

<sup>221</sup> I do not think that the notion that "...Christians...seek the common good of the broader community..." (Peng, *Hate Evil*, 105) is very much in the picture here.

<sup>222</sup> Martin Bucer's unease with this peculiar formulation can be sensed in his emphatic comment that "...per non malum facere, intelligit [Paul] benefacere". (M. Bucer, *Metaphrasis et Enarratio In Epist. D. Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos* (Basel: Petrus Perna, 1562, 577). P. Spicq wonders if "...[a]imer son prochain se limite-t-il à s'abstenir de lui nuire?" (C. Spicq, *Agape dans le Nouveau Testament* (vol.1; Paris: Gabalda, 1985) 264. Lyonnet thinks that this can be explained by the negative form of the commandments or that Paul follows Rabbinic customs of summing up the law in a sort of negative Golden Rule (Lyonnet, 'Charité', 156).

<sup>223</sup> Horrell claims that there is considerable overlap even between Pauline and Greco-Roman views on marriage and sexuality (Horrell, *Solidarity*, 155-159).

<sup>224</sup> Sincere love drives the believers to reach out actively to each other and compete in doing good to each other (12:10, 13). Dunn rightly points out that the negative statement in 10a is preceded by a positive one in 9c (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 780). Still, the enumeration of οὐ sentences gives a predominantly negative impression.

have only negative ones here. And once again, the example of Christ's self-sacrifice, love's demonstration *par excellence*, does not enter the picture.<sup>225</sup>

### c) The function of ἀγάπη

I suggest that Paul's use of love is complex here. While he clearly starts off using it as the insider term and marking it off from an altogether different ethical key of 'giving one's due' he glances back over his shoulder as he proceeds and affirms love as the attitude and ethical stance that fulfils both the Torah and civic obligations.<sup>226</sup> This oscillating is in keeping with the overall tone of Romans 12 and 13: While some parts of chapters 12 and 13 clearly deal with the believers' conduct towards outsiders and others clearly deal with inner-Christian relations, we must allow for some in-between space where Paul's speech can refer to either.<sup>227</sup> Paul mentions the due given to everybody and the mutual love in the church in one breath (13: 8). While it is true that agape vocabulary is properly used in the realm of the church and in connection with Christ, there is again a 'seeping through' quality of love. Those who are beloved and love each other in the church will love their neighbours, too, at the very least in the sense that they do not harm them.<sup>228</sup> This not only fits very well with Paul's teaching in 12: 19-21 (those who are beloved must not do anything bad to outsiders, even if they are treated badly), it also echoes and rephrases Paul's warning in 13:4: 'If you do what is bad, be afraid' becomes 'Love does nothing bad to its neighbour'. I think it is not far-fetched, then, to read Romans 13:8-10 as Paul's

<sup>225</sup> Cranfield ponders the negative form of love a while and suggests that this is a sober safeguard for overly sentimental but empty conceptions of love. He is of course right in saying that "...the negative formulation is due to the negative form of the commandments..." (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 678), but the fact that Paul ties up his notion of love with these (negative) commandments here is meaningful and could well be motivated by what was previously said about the interaction with authorities.

<sup>226</sup> In that sense Engberg-Pedersen's statement that "[i]n Rom.12-13 Paul does *not* extend Christian ἀγάπη to cover non-believers" (Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicizing Politics', 166) is too absolute. Dunn, too, commends ambiguity: "Perhaps it would be best to say that Paul has fellow believers particularly in view but not in any exclusive way" (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 776). Similarly Horrell, *Solidarity*, 253, n.26.

<sup>227</sup> Romans 12:15 is a case in point. It sits between a clear 'outsider verse' (14b) and a clear 'insider verse' (16). Should the believers weep with all those weeping or just with Christian mourners? It could well be that Paul has primarily Christians in mind but it would be absurd to claim that a wider application of this verse is to misinterpret Paul (similarly Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 23). Thorsteinsson, too, admits that "Paul's discourse in 12:14-21 is somewhat entangled by his rather unsystematic procedure of speaking interchangeably of in-group and out-group relations" (Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity*, 97).

<sup>228</sup> It is in the sense that the κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται reaches back to 13:3 and 4 that I speak of love fulfilling civic obligations. I do not suggest that νόμος refers to Roman law.

reassuring affirmation that those who love will fulfil basic human rules of living together peacefully just as they fulfil the righteous commandments of the law.<sup>229</sup>

Does this mean that love is seen as the defining criterion for ‘the good’ even in the world of politics? <sup>230</sup> Does it mean that doing what is ‘good’ in the sight of the authorities is a concretisation of the love command?<sup>231</sup> Or does love compel the Christians to support political institutions?<sup>232</sup> Or can love be identified with the good and the good with love so that the authorities can be seen as the guardians and protectors of love? <sup>233</sup> I think that Paul’s proposal is more modest at this stage. Love takes its cue from elsewhere than civil obligations and is played out in a different key altogether.<sup>234</sup> But at the same time love does nothing bad to anybody and is therefore compatible with a broad and basic notion of civic good.<sup>235</sup> More importantly, it renders the ambiguous political authorities unambiguously good for the believers, because they, who are doing no harm to anybody, will not clash with them.

The Christian paradigm of love then, is the greater reality which encloses almost as a ‘by-product’ good and generally approved behaviour in the civic and political world.<sup>236</sup> In other words the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as perceived by the political authorities

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<sup>229</sup> I feel encouraged in this reading by Cranfield who comments on 13:4 “So we take it that by σοί the *Christian* who is doing ‘that which is good’ is meant, and that θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν is an assurance addressed to him” (Cranfield, *Romans II*, 666). Käsemann, too, notes in passing that “...der Gemeinde [wird] versichert, dass sie bei angemessenem Verhalten nichts zu befürchten hat” (Käsemann, *Römer*, 344).

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Dunn who states that love of neighbour is the model for the ‘good’ (Dunn, ‘Charter’, 67).

<sup>231</sup> E.g. Merklein, ‘Sinn und Zweck’, 246.

<sup>232</sup> “Ergo violat charitatem si quis ἀναρχίαν inducit, quam statim consequitur rerum omnium perturbatio” (J. Calvin, *Der Brief an die Römer. Ein Kommentar* (Calvin-Studienausgabe, Band 5.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), 670).

<sup>233</sup> “Nach dem Voranstehenden besteht das Gute inhaltlich in der Liebe. Weil der Staat sein göttliches Mandat zur Ahndung des Bösen wie zur Anerkennung des Guten hat, sollen Christen sich ihm unterordnen als dem Schützer der Liebe, deren Täter selbst auf jede Gewalt zu verzichten haben” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 39).

<sup>234</sup> Cassidy rightly points out that in answer to his rhetorical question in Romans 13:3 Paul replies: “Do what is good” not “Do what the authorities say” (Cassidy, ‘Politicization’, 389). The ‘good’ equally creates closeness and a certain distance between the Christians and the authorities by being a joint point of reference, which is however approached by the Christians from their own angle.

<sup>235</sup> Wilckens sums up this different key beautifully by describing love as “...[das]...Tun, in dem alles Böse nicht nur vermieden, sondern überwunden wird (12, 21)” (Wilckens, *Römer 12-16*, 71). But it does not follow from this that the Torah calls towards love by prohibiting what is evil (ibid., 71). The relationship cannot be inverted: Love aims at doing the good, but doing the good is not co-extensive with love and forbidding evil does not necessarily aim at encouraging love. The authorities do not love or protect love. The Christians do not love the authorities (*Contra* Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 781).

<sup>236</sup> It is not that easy to bring the Christian group life on the side of the eschaton and keep the authorities on the plane of penultimate realities. Rather than suggesting a bifocal strategy then (X- and

is a subset of the Christian good, which is lived out in love, and possibly of what Christians reject as bad. This is not to say that the Roman Christians should just do the minimum and stay away from trouble. The call to love one's neighbour is serious and may well imply an active reaching out, too, as 12: 14-21 has shown. However, Paul primarily wants to emphasize here the match between the values of the eschatological people of God on the one hand and the present structures of the world. All this is said very much from the perspective of the believers: They are to submit and do the good in order that the authorities are truly experienced 'for your good'. Whether it could be in the interest of love to support suitable political institutions or resist them for that matter is not in the picture. Even less is there an attempt to let such institutions reflect to some degree the love of God shown in Christ. Paul has carefully chosen the designation of θεοῦ διακονός for the state representative and not Χριστοῦ διακονός.<sup>237</sup> After our inquiry I think it likely that θεός does not point subversively and challenging to the God and Father of the crucified and risen Lord<sup>238</sup> but to God's abiding activity of incriminating, judging and condemning what is evil, before and beyond his merciful deeds in Christ.

In our previously developed vocabulary we could sum up these observations by stating that the counter-intuitive does not take the lead at this stage but is shown again as being compatible with the 'commonsensical' and 'symmetrical' approach of punishing bad and praising good.

#### 6.4.4.4 Summary

Summing up our observations the following can be said:

- The authorities are perceived as doing something good, though it does not reflect the goodness that God has shown in Christ, which overcomes the bad and reconciles the enemy.

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also not-X, but Y) (Engberg-Pedersen, 'Stoicizing Politics', 170) Paul seems to call for Y (the group ethos), which includes X (the requirements of the state).

<sup>237</sup> But cf. Romans 15:16 ( λειτουργός Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ) in contrast to 13:6.

<sup>238</sup> *Contra* Jewett, *Romans*, 790.

- Nevertheless, the authorities still mirror an abiding aspect of God's work, namely marking good and evil for what they are and judging them accordingly.
- This implies that the authorities have a certain grasp about what good and bad are, even if this is not co-extensive with the Christian insight.
- There is sufficient common ground in the perception of self-evident good and bad to make the authorities trustworthy for the Christian believers.
- Because of this basic trustworthiness Christians are called to give the authorities their due.
- The authorities are mainly busy with 'hating what is evil'.
- Christians on the other hand are called to love. This is their paradigm, both in terms of motivation, empowerment and strategy. They are God's beloved and called to love each other. They also love their neighbours and reach out with deeds of kindness even to hostile people.
- The Christian believers who face opposition and animosities do not have to fear the authorities: Their lifestyle will also meet the requirements of the authorities. The one aspect of love that matters for the authorities is 'doing nothing bad to anybody'.
- Christians do not look to the state when they need to be informed and motivated about their ethics,<sup>239</sup> just as they do not look (primarily) to the Torah. Their paradigm is focussed on love which overcomes evil. Nevertheless Christian love fulfils the law and meets the requirements of basic civic decency with ease. The bigger reality of love covers and includes 'the good' the authorities rightly praise. The Christians, however, have no task to hold the authorities accountable to the criterion of love or to influence

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<sup>239</sup> *Contra* Schrage: "‘das gute Werk’, das den Staat nicht zu fürchten hat, ist nicht das am Masstab der Agape, sondern an dem der iustitia civilis zu erkennende Gute" (Willi Schrage, *Die Christen und der Staat nach dem Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 57.



society to become more loving. The society of love, it seems, is coextensive with the Spirit-filled, eschatological people of God only.

- On the other hand the authorities are said to embody something ‘good’ that is outside the sphere of gracious love, namely punishing evil-doers. While Paul eased tension in one realm (love and civic good go together) he builds up a considerable field of tension for later generations through leaving it open whether Christians are permitted to wield the sword, a ‘good’ that does not match the higher Christological good.
- In Yoder’s view the distinctive and differing descriptions of the Christian ethos (Romans 12) and activities of the authorities (Romans 13:1-7), make it clear that a Christian cannot take part in the authorities’ activity of wielding the sword. Paul’s verdict of ‘good’ on the authorities’ activities is highly problematic and a cause for much tension in Yoder’s narrative, as we have seen. God’s final revelation is God’s outburst of forgiving goodness and suffering love in Christ. In this horizon penal activities cannot be called ‘good’ unreservedly anymore. Yoder oscillates between approving of a modest state that minimizes its violent actions, and criticizing it as fundamentally wanting and in need of as much reform as possible.
- O’Donovan sees the judging activities of political authorities as more unproblematic. In fact, it is a direct consequence of the Christ event that the authorities focus their activities on the rendering of judgment, which is also at the heart of the Christ event. With Paul, O’Donovan would assign a modest but both necessary and unproblematic task to the rulers after Christ. While the church celebrates the merciful and gracious aspect of God’s judgment in Christ, the state, according to O’Donovan, has a different, complementary and somewhat dialectical task. In order for God’s good purposes to reach their ultimate goal, church and authorities have to be in a critical, dialectical interaction where the church is prevented from becoming state-like, and the state is prevented from becoming a salvific agent. Nonetheless, the authorities have to learn from their ecclesial tutors both modesty and better practices, which go beyond that which Paul calls ‘good’.

- Both Yoder and O'Donovan make strenuous and ingenious attempts to integrate political authority Christologically, without conflating the distinctive identities of church and 'state'. *Political authority after Christ is not the same as political authority before Christ, at least in terms of assessing political authority.* It is exactly at this point where Paul takes a very different route. He makes no attempt to inscribe the role of the state into his Christological universe. Instead he is content to show up the overlap between the worldview that is driven by the Christ vision, and the worldview of the authorities with its resulting demands and activities. I hold that Paul quite consciously disconnects Christological reflections from his reflections on political authorities, just as he stubbornly refuses to highlight the conjunctions where the 'symbolic universe' of the emperor and the 'symbolic universe' of the Christ believers will likely get into conflict. For Paul, political authorities need no Christological re-authorization whatsoever. They fulfil one abiding aspect of the sum total of divine activity, namely judgment. While this judgment is clearly tilted towards God's mercy in Christ in Paul's main narrative (Romans 1-11), this is seemingly not the case when it comes to the activities of the authorities. Unlike Yoder and O'Donovan, Paul pursues a non-dispensationalist view of political authorities. At the deepest level we need not so much to reflect on Paul's view of government, as on his correlation of God's wrathful judgment with God's gracious mercy in Christ.

## 7. Conclusions

In my conclusions I will first sum up the major findings of this thesis under ‘Reading Paul with O’Donovan and Yoder’ (7.1). Going through the three principal interpretative categories one last time I will each time briefly outline O’Donovan’s and Yoder’s narrative or account and see how Paul’s account compares or contrasts with it.

In a second part (7.2) I will point out how O’Donovan’s and Yoder’s narrative can be read as an attempt to transcend Paul’s consistent but somewhat constrained narrative and make it more fruitful for a direct interaction between church and political authorities.

In a last part (7.3) I will show how Paul could lead us beyond the narratives of Yoder and O’Donovan with their corresponding impasses and tensions.

### 7.1 Reading Paul with O’Donovan and Yoder

#### 7.1.1 Christ the Lord

From O’Donovan’s account we take away a narrative with a number of complex trajectories. In this tale political authority is God’s gift to humanity. It flourishes most fully in all its aspects in Israel, mediating God’s good design. The Imperial forces which oppress Israel damage this full mediation of a ‘nation under God’. Jesus as God’s anointed challenges both the Imperial powers and the diminished political existence of Israel. But then Jesus’ political authority is already transposed into a different key: He empowers and constitutes a people in the power of the Spirit and in truth. This people is further judged, owned and rescued through Christ’s death and resurrection. The risen Lord rules over the church in messianic dignity, but is presently hidden and in no way directly mediated through earthly rulers. Christ’s Lordship over the whole cosmos inspires the church to seek growing acknowledgment of this Lord and to engage the wider world, not least the world of politics, in his name.

From Yoder's narrative we learn about political authority that time and again goes bad by embracing violence, nationalism and domination, not least in Israel. In Jesus God reveals his original design for humanity: The man (Jesus), who lives as the non-violent servant, establishes the community that flourishes peacefully without domination, oppression and violence. Jesus is the antidote to standard political rulers, and this makes him highly provocative for them. The community established by his example and in the power of his Spirit embodies a genuine alternative to how the world organizes communities. Jesus' resurrection makes suffering and servanthood normative for his followers. Jesus is an anti-Lord and the character of his Lordship varies between denouncing, subverting and reforming political rule as the world knows it. His Lordship over the whole cosmos enables his followers both to be content with not being in control and to engage the wider world, not least the world of politics, in his name.

Approaching our selected Pauline texts we see a lot of O'Donovan's and Yoder's concerns flashing up in Paul's use of political imagery:

Christ the Lord is also the central political metaphor of Paul's theological discourse. Paul presents Christ as the Lord, with the help of political imagery such as images of a ruler, scenes of salvation/rescue (Phil 3:20-21) and scenes of homage (Phil 2:9-11). Paul uses these images in a fairly archaic way, alluding to deeply embedded collective images of power and status, without sharpening them up to target a recognisable figure in the present time. Nevertheless they have the potential to refer to a more precise situation or person, as every ruler embodies aspects of the archaic. Paul's Christ is God's ultimate, final, supreme and universal Lord, who will get homage from the whole world and will subject the whole of reality. Included in this totality are no doubt rulers and kings, but they are not singled out in any sense.

Christ the Lord is given the central place in God's eschatological plan of salvation. Paul alludes to Old Testament imagery of such salvation, where God presents himself as the final saviour-king with a highly polemical and exclusive slant. However, Paul does not present a narrative, as to how political authority was passed on and transformed from Israel to the church. His Christ poem opens many doors to many different routes: There is potential for defiance when confronted with an idolatrous or anti-Christian ruler. But there is also potential for affirming rule as

God's design, perhaps in a transposed key. The image of final homage can accommodate a narrative like O'Donovan's of growing submission of rulers to God's Christ. But it equally can accommodate a much cruder Constantinian narrative where an earthly king directly rules on behalf of Christ. The moving account of the humiliation and suffering of Christ can accommodate a narrative like Yoder's, where Christ subverts common notions of lording and ruling altogether. But the whole poem can also accommodate a tale of a crusading church that will be victorious through all hardship and trials and will in due course subject proud alternative lords.

Against anti-Imperial readings we hold that we must not assume that parallel language is automatically polemical language. Instead, the larger narrative and literary context is decisive.

Concerning Paul's use of the Christ poem I first want to repeat some negative findings very briefly:

- a) Paul does not follow up or exploit the potential for criticizing the direct or indirect *idolatry* of political rulers.
- b) Paul does not follow up the *ethical* potential for criticizing bad rulers, such as the possible aside to "robber kings" in Phil 2:6.
- c) Paul does not follow up, exploit or expand the potential for challenging *any* ruler on *theocratic* grounds.
- d) Paul does not follow up any *missional* potential to integrate rulers in Christ's hierarchy.

In short, Paul fails to reflect on the interaction between the rulers of this world and the ultimate Lord of the cosmos, where we expect him to do so. This astonishing indifference is confirmed by our second textual sample, Romans 13:1-7. Paul makes no attempt whatsoever to draw a line from Christ the Lord and other political authorities in his one piece of direct political admonition and reflection. There is no labouring over wrong and false allegiances, over idolatrous gestures of homage and false obedience to human rulers, either in the text or in its immediate context.

There is no musing on gestures of prophetic defiance or challenge, nor are there dreams of enlisting the rulers of this world in the service of Christ.

This remarkable *non sequitur* can of course be read as a tacit undermining of the rulers of this world all the more powerful by being merely implicit. But such a reading is just that: A reading from silence. We can of course fill the awkward gaps in Paul's texts with implied polemic, which can be neither confirmed nor disproved on the surface of the text because Paul happens not to be interested in such topics in a given place. If the main pillars of an argument rest on what the silence in a text is supposed to say and on assumed hidden structures of the text such as irony and codes, we are in no position anymore to critically evaluate the plausibility of such a reading.

My first thesis is then, this:

### **Thesis 1**

**Paul uses political and imperial imagery as a tentative analogy rather than as a dark foil when speaking about Christ.**

**Paul is not interested in putting Christ's ultimate rule and the rule of present political rulers such as Caesar in any sort of comparison, contrast or interaction.**

**His choice of metaphor does not imply purposeful polemic against other powerful rulers such as the emperor.**

## **7.1.2 The Church as the Community under Authority**

Though Christ is the Lord of the whole world and will be visibly so at the final consummation, his Lordship at present plays out first and foremost in the church.

O'Donovan defines the church as the 'community under authority'. As this community lives under the ultimate Lord and has experienced God's final liberating judgment we assume that it is also in some sense 'ultimate': It has an ultimate communal identity (possession), has gone through ultimate judgment, and looks forward to ultimate salvation. In that sense it is truly free, not answerable to any other ruler and in no need of political promises of salvation or worldly communal

identities. However, because of Christ's transposed key of Lordship his rule must not be directly mediated by earthly rulers. Likewise, the church can never be fully politicized. The identity of the church as a fully political city is something that must be deferred to the eschatological consummation. The church has to be 'politically underdressed'. Because of this, the spiritually and 'ideologically' free and self-sufficient church still needs structures of earthly political rule and the communal life sponsored thereby.

From Yoder we learnt to see the church even more as a distinctive, socio-political body of committed members who agreed to Jesus' costly path of discipleship. The church is the true political which offers an alternative political discourse. It can afford to be a minority, insignificant and powerless, because it has an all-powerful Lord. However, this Lord will not rule over the church visibly or in a mediated fashion through some earthly ruler. This would betray Christ's pattern of suffering servanthood. Because of this *caveat* the church is in the strange position that even as the 'true political' it cannot replace the worldly account of political authority right now. Yoder admits very reluctantly and inconsistently that the church still needs worldly political authority. It is not a totally autonomous or anarchic community but depends on wider political structures and in the last resort on the questionable activities of political rulers. The church then embodies an alternative paradigm of peaceful community life though it still supports and uses the secure space of other political institutions.

If Paul draws no line from Christ the Lord to other lords he draws a very thick line from Christ to the church. In this Paul agrees most closely with O'Donovan's and Yoder's narrative. Like O'Donovan Paul sees the church as a tangible social reality, the 'community under the authority of the risen Christ'. Christ's authority first and foremost constitutes and upholds this new community as, e.g., the narrative of Romans is keen to show. This new community has boundaries and leads to a re-assessment of prior identities as Phil 3:3-11 and Romans 14 make clear. But it equally inspires a range of positive practices and behavioural patterns. Our textual samples in both Philippians (Phil 2:1-4; Philippians 3) and Romans (Romans 12) highlight virtues of mutual harmony, self-less love, perseverance and humility. The otherwise important Pauline topics of idolatry and sexual vices are dealt with quite quickly and curtly in the respective texts where Paul talks about the 'community

under authority' or 'Christ's body'. This suggests that the person and career of Christ plays an important role not just as Lord but also as exemplar in embodying a pattern of self-giving and self-denying love. This is more clearly spelled out in Philippians than in Romans, though there are echoes of these themes in Romans 12, too.

The aspect of *conformity* in Paul's sketching out of the relationship between the church and its Lord is just as important as in Yoder's narrative, and very similar in its ethos and practices. We therefore have a clearly marked out community, which is brought into being, sustained and shaped by its Lord in a distinctive way. This community has certain boundaries and a recognisable ethical pattern. This pattern is sometimes stylized in stark difference to the surrounding world, sometimes common ground is freely or more tacitly assumed. Christ's pattern jars and conflicts with a lot of the surrounding cultural assumptions but its adherents are also called to discern and weigh up. They are to be considerate and to acknowledge good things everywhere (Romans 12: 17; Phil 4:8). It is certainly not the shape of any anti-Christ that negatively directs and orders the socio-political existence of the church, but Christ alone. We have thus a truly free community that is free to obey and free to resist, free to acknowledge and celebrate common ground, and free to be distinctive.

All this ties in well with O'Donovan's and Yoder's concerns to depict the church as God's unique eschatological project, but at the same time to affirm created structures (O'Donovan) and negotiate common ground and shared concerns with the wider world (Yoder).

What seems to be lacking in Paul much more than in O'Donovan and Yoder is the stylizing of the church as the true political community *over against* other political communities. Again, Paul seems to use political metaphors in order to call the church to conformity and hope in following its humble Lord who is already exalted and will bring them, too, from humility to glory. Where Paul sees the church in sharp apocalyptic distance from other human associations and their practices this happens on a very broad canvas where the 'heavenly constitution' is contrasted with 'earthly-mindedness'. It is not (just) things like 'proud Roman citizenship', 'violent domination', 'idolatrous emperor-worship' and 'competing for honour' that Paul targets in such moments, but a broad and often unspecified spectrum of bad human practices and it takes some degree of imagination to connect them all with the



emperor or Imperial court, as anti-Imperial authors do. For both, O'Donovan and Yoder this is somewhat problematic, and needs some further reflection in what way the church still depends on worldly political structures even in its existence as the ultimate eschatological political body.

It seems to me that this is no big issue for Paul. Though the believers in Rome might have been tempted (for theological, Christological or other reasons) to join gestures of protest or defiance towards the ruling authorities Paul simply seems to take it for granted that the 'community under authority' lives among wider political structures and is content to inculcate submission. It does not occur to him to enter a debate of why the church should or should not be 'politically underdressed' as the embodiment of the 'true political'.

## **Thesis 2**

**Paul uses Christ's Lordship and its associated imagery to present the church as the 'community under authority'. This community is brought into being, sustained and shaped by Christ and is to embody the distinctive pattern Christ embodied in his own career. This pattern is often seen in distance and even polemical difference from 'the world', though upon a closer reading we see many strategies of negotiating and acknowledging common ground.**

**Paul does not consistently stylize or sharpen up the church as Christ's body over against other (socio)-political bodies.**

**It seems that Paul takes it for granted that the church is not and must not be fully politicized but lives instead contentedly within wider political structures.**

### **7.1.3 Church and State in Eschaton**

Both Yoder and O'Donovan offer a subtle and complex tale about the church engaging and not engaging the rulers *qua* rulers. In both narratives the task of political authority does not really change at the surface but has undergone a fundamental and meaningful reframing in Christ. In Yoder's case Christ's light casts

a dark shadow over the world of politics. The activities of the state must be judged as wanting and are accepted with the greatest reluctance in the service of the church's mission. This service is conceived to be minimal in carving out a space of security and functioning communal life for the church. In O'Donovan's case the rulers are rounded up and confronted with Christ's claims and are deprived of two strands of their traditional task. They are merely assigned 'judgment' as an abidingly important function that even the church still seems to need. Political authority in this modest form is however fully affirmed. The state is a servant of the church's mission though in a very low-key way. Both authors would not hear of any sort of 'Christocracy'. Nevertheless both narratives have a 'dispensationalist flavour'. Political authority can be meaningful engaged, critiqued and reformed through the mission of the church, the true political society under the true Lord. They are centrally affected by God's eschatological Christ narrative.

Turning to Paul our biggest surprise is that Paul makes no effort whatsoever to integrate the world of politics into his Christological and ecclesial narrative.

As we have seen, Paul advocates genuine support for political authority. Though it is far from enthusiastic, it is robust and genuine. Paul does not hesitate to bolster his argument with a strong theological rationale. Though there may be anxieties of keeping vulnerable people from unnecessary danger which drive his argument, Paul commends the activities of the authorities as 'good for you'. Paul does not seem to have high expectations about the state and his advice is far removed from a jubilant panegyric for Imperial peace and salvation. What the authorities do is just fine though, and their business deserves appropriate support, both mental and financial. While Paul connects the activities of the authorities with God's just judgment, an abiding part of divine activity, he very strikingly does not connect the authorities with Christ's Lordship or God's salvific deed in Christ. It simply does not occur to him to address or influence the authorities in Christ's name or on behalf of Christ.

The standard account for this astonishing indifference or non-chalance is of course twofold:

On the one hand Paul had no opportunities to influence politics in the way citizens of democratic states do. Secondly, he had no interest in politics as he expected the

world to draw to a close in the near future. This, however, is not totally convincing. I imagine that Paul could certainly have tried to approach people in positions of authority, to win their respect and to influence them. Church members could have assured rulers of their prayers and loyalty and perhaps given money for a public enterprise. Though the opportunities of political involvement have certainly been broadened immensely in modern times it seems to be a bit unimaginative to think that political action is limited to running for office or voting.

The second argument carries more weight. There are passages in Paul which can be read as a certain detachment from the institutions of this world in the light of the in-breaking of the new age (1 Cor 7). Still, Paul did not sit around and wait for the *parousia*. He still felt it to be appropriate to deal with the ordering of ecclesial affairs, in other words with the shaping of a social institution. Most importantly he pursued an ambitious mission, adapting various strategies to fulfil it. If political authority could be made serviceable to promote this mission or somehow linked to it I imagine it would have captured his interest.

While the authorities get a respectful nod in Romans 13:1-7 we have seen that equally and even more the Christ believers get patted reassuringly on their shoulder, so to speak. Paul's brief musings on political authority is written for subjects, not for rulers after all. In all their distinctiveness as a 'body' the church is like 'every soul' when it comes to political authority. The believers are to submit and to render those in power their due. Paul draws no line from the authorities' task to the church's mission. He does not ask for more and will not render more than what 'every soul' asks for and renders.

Like O'Donovan and Yoder, Paul continues the narrative of the 'people ruled over by God' from the Jewish tradition. Like Yoder and O'Donovan he discontinues the theocratic tale of 'a nation under God'. Paul's admonition makes it crystal clear that the church in all its socio-political and spiritual distinctiveness is not a fully politicized and autonomous political body. Nor should it aspire to be one. On the contrary, despite its unique socio-political identity, which leads to tangible practices it is still very much part of and dependent on larger socio-political structures and those governing them. In this situation it is of critical importance for the believers to

be encouraged and reassured that their apocalyptic stance does not jerk them out of this wider structure.

Paul is more radical than Yoder and O'Donovan in showing no aspirations to reconfigure or engage the world of politics in the name of Christ. His foremost goal is to create a space of overlap and compatibility between the world of politics and the body of Christ, seen very much from the perspective of the believers.

Unlike in Yoder, the people who operate in a paradigm of forgiving love do not stand in critical distance from the state, condemning its penal activities as wanting. Instead Paul assures them that through pursuing their distinctive lifestyle they will also meet the general demands of political rulers by 'not harming anybody.' Their notion of 'good' and 'bad' matches that of the authorities, though there is more to be said of what is ultimately 'good' in the Christian church. The church members can rest assured that in their role as subjects or citizens they will not stick out as trouble makers but will be at least left alone as those who need not fear the penalizing sword, because they will do nothing bad to their fellow citizens.

### **Thesis 3**

**For Paul political authority has not changed after Christ. It has a respected place in doing some good and cannot be dismissed as superfluous by the 'community under Christ's authority'. Nor should it be criticized as wanting. The bearers of political authority mirror an abiding aspect of God's overall work, namely symmetric judgment. This makes them deserving of Christian support. While the Christ believers know a higher ethical paradigm than that of the authorities, Paul emphasizes the common ground between church members and authorities at this point. He reassures the Christ believers that living in the Christ-like paradigm they will also satisfy the demands of the authorities and be left alone.**

## **7.2 Grappling with the loose ends: O'Donovan and Yoder beyond Paul**

In a first round of conclusions we have seen how Paul can be mapped out on the respective narratives of Yoder and O'Donovan, where he matches that narrative and where he is silent and where he follows a surprising and different turning of the road.

In this section I briefly want to comment on how O'Donovan and Yoder can be seen as grappling with loose ends and unlocked potentials in Paul. Once again it must be noted that I do not treat O'Donovan and Yoder as Pauline exegetes. My purpose is to show in what way both authors can be seen as offering perspectives that go beyond the constraints of the Pauline discourse.

### **7.2.1 The Pull of a Metaphor**

Paul uses powerful and charged political imagery. He focuses it very rigorously on the life of the church. There is something liberating and refreshing in Paul's political discourse: This is first and foremost about the church and its particular identity, not about the rulers of this world. The latter can be given a respectful but also quite detached nod, as reflecting part of the divine activity. When it comes to talking about concrete political authority Paul keeps Christ out of the picture. The activities of the authorities are Christologically under-integrated. Paul avoids a lot of the tangles and conundra Yoder and O'Donovan get themselves into by following through consistently his ecclesio-centred political discourse. His discourse is more clear-cut and unproblematic on a logical level.

However, there is something powerful in the political metaphor of the supreme and ultimate Lord. Something calls out to be at last applied more directly to the world of politics. Something within the picture strives to challenge, engage or conquer the rulers of this world. In short, the metaphor is prone to roll back from Paul's intended

target area (the life of the church under the authority of its Lord) back into its source area (the rulers of this world).<sup>1</sup>

One attempt to link Christ and the rulers is the anti-Imperial readings, which contrast and juxtapose Christ the Lord and Lord Caesar. In fact, it is not hard to imagine how certain potentials within Paul's imagery, e.g. the critique of idolatry, would be unlocked and start to bite once the head of state would ask for compromising or idolatrous gestures on part of his Christian subjects. We have one early example of such a re-configuration of the metaphor of Lordship in the book of Revelation.

Yoder and O'Donovan make much more subtle and complex attempts to link Christ's Lordship with political authority. While they very clearly and determinately abide with Paul's ecclesial starting point in his political discourse they also want to think beyond it. In their own ways they both strive to break through the Pauline indifference, and to engage the rulers directly. Both authors are very careful to keep a clear line, though not a wall of separation, between Christ's rule in the church and what happens in the world of politics. The eschatological horizon is important for both authors, too. The church is not meant to mediate Christ's rule in any sense. What Christ will ultimately achieve is more than what the church can and should achieve at present. Still, both authors insist that while Christ's story is about transformed rule and transformed political categories it is nonetheless a story about *political rule*. It must therefore affect earthly rulers, either by targeting them consistently and purposefully, as in O'Donovan, or by addressing them sporadically and passionately as in Yoder. That Christ is Lord and no other has a message the worldly rulers need to hear and learn. In Yoder's case they have to be exposed to a fundamental critique of their ways that the non-violent and humble example of Christ the Lord implicates. In O'Donovan's case they have to be challenged to recast themselves in a modest secular way. Both authors furthermore insist that a measure of the Christological and ecclesial 'goodness' can and should be reflected by the state, not just the church.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the second option has no time anymore for the church. The change is that in the first application rulers are of no particular interest in God's eschatological drama whereas in the second application it is a crucial act of this drama that rulers are de-throned, either because they are simply rulers or because they are sinful rulers. In the second application it is a key element of the church's existence to resist and challenge rulers.

Paul displays neither the ambition nor the desire to impact the world of politics with his Gospel message. The state can only restrain and punish evil, not overcome it as the Christians are called to. This thankfully puts up a strong barrier against the darker experiments in Church history of promoting the 'love' of Christ by the more violent means of the state. But it also puts up a barrier against attempts to change and transform even the world of politics in the light of Christ. The way to a humanizing reform of horrific penal codes or towards a welfare state that translates Christian solidarity into the wider world of politics is equally blocked by Paul's vision.

Yoder and O'Donovan can be seen as amending this frustrating situation. Yoder clearly wishes to impact the world of politics with Christian practices. In Pauline terms, he emphasizes and enlarges the weight and scope of the 'spilling over' and 'seeping through' quality of Christian love. O'Donovan wants political authority to live in an Augustinian dialectic with the church, always challenged by God's ultimate goal of mercy, even when rendering judgment. In Pauline terms, he wants to transfer the narrative dynamic of Romans 1-11, where wrath and judgment are tilted towards mercy onto the field of interactions between state and church.

Yoder and O'Donovan both ask in their own way: If Christ is God's ultimate revelation of political rule and - closely connected - political existence understood as the successful living together of human beings, how can Christ *not* approach and engage political rulers properly so called?

### **7.2.2 Lord of the Church-Lord of the Universe: Tying together loose threads?**

As we have seen, Paul has a way of placing his ecclesio-centric political discourse within a *cosmic* horizon of Christ's Lordship. The rule of Christ will one day be all-embracing far beyond the limits of the church. Everybody will acknowledge Christ's rule, everything will be subject to it. When Paul points to the horizon of final consummation he *does* have a way of speaking about Christ's rule beyond the church. Whenever we saw Paul speaking in such a way about Christ's Lordship we also had to admit that rulers and powers are somehow linked with Christ, though in a very generalized and summary way and without being singled out. It is precisely the cosmic dimension of Christ's Lordship that makes it a source of hope for the

believers: The reality they are promised is much bigger and richer than anything they can ever embody or achieve. Thanks to this cosmic horizon hope is indeed intense in some of the texts we considered. This hope offers powerful resources for endurance in hardship and persistence in a difficult task (Romans 8:37; Phil 3:21). It encourages the Christ believers to view their present conformity to Christ's humble suffering already under the angle of his glory. Interestingly, in talking about this hope, we have strong connotations of reassurance but minimal vindictive overtones, though the latter are not completely absent.

When Paul talks about various powers and authorities, who may at times turn in a hostile way against the Christ believers (including political authorities, whose sword we see flashing up for a second in Romans 8:35) he assures the believers that they are safe and secure from the powers "through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Christ is the Lord stronger than all the rulers who presently might threaten and oppress the believers. Yet again, there is strikingly little interest in talking about the fate of the powers or how this ultimate fate might reflect back on the Christ-believers' *present* interactions with them. The same Lord who conforms, rules and saves the church is also the future universal Lord who is already all-powerful by shielding the believers and leading them safely through all perils, including the threats and persecution of bad rulers.

Again, Paul's discourse is consistent and unproblematic as far as the church is concerned. However, he does not spell out whether the ultimately visible and 'real' Lordship of Christ casts some light or shadow on the rulers already in the *present*.

O'Donovan's and Yoder's narrative can be read as an attempt to bring together Paul's loose threads and to state in what way the future and present Lord of the Universe already affects the rulers of this world positively or negatively.

This, however, is far from simple. Yoder very strongly emphasizes the humble character of Christ's Lordship which has never been reversed by his exaltation. It is impossible to be a Christian and to ignore this very demanding pattern of discipleship. There is hope that this pattern will at last stand vindicated and victorious in the future. But can there be moments of anticipated victory in history, such as political success for pacifists? Yoder clearly struggles with the prospect of



too much and too permanently realized eschatology. Faithfulness must always prevail over success. Yoder's presentation of Christ's Lordship then oscillates between engaging and reforming and deconstructing notions of rule. If Christ rules in a most paradoxical fashion that is clearly not feasible for earthly rulers, the conversation is in danger of breaking down. Yoder hesitates to picture Christ's ultimate Lordship as 'lording over' other rulers.

O'Donovan on the other hand frowns upon a worldview that will not allow for a progressive though limited triumph of Christ even in the here and now. God's story with Christ heads from humiliation to exaltation – the mission of the church equally boldly hopes and prays for Christ's cause to make advances in the world. This quite rightly and logically includes the conversion of rulers. To deny this would be to deny the power of God. However, O'Donovan does not want rulers to be the present mediators of Christ's final rule, because this would destroy the eschatological horizon and tension. Rulers must bear witness to Christ's victory in the indirect fashion of their own self-reduction. In this process they are robbed of much of what is essential for an authority that generates community.

Yoder's and O'Donovan's attempts to link the future Lord of the world and the present Lord of the church with the present rulers of the world are laudable and almost heroic. But they are time and again confronted with almost unsuperable difficulties and problems.

Summing up this section we can say:

- Metaphors of rule and authority are extremely useful and powerful to constitute the church as a community that reflects tangibly and closely the ethos instituted by its Lord but also lives, prays and hopes in a wide horizon that is much bigger than anything it can ever achieve or embody.
- Metaphors of rule and authority as they are presented in the Christological narrative can only be connected with great difficulty to the world of politics. Any serious attempts to do so will constantly be confronted with the tension between Christ's likeness with rulers and Christ's unlikeness with rulers, on the one hand and Christ's present rule in the church, which is hidden, and Christ's open rule over the world, which is future, on the other hand.

### **7.3 Putting the Church back in the Center: Paul beyond O'Donovan and Yoder?**

O'Donovan and Yoder in one sense closely follow the Pauline Christ narrative but also try to move beyond it where it seems to be restricted and wanting. Can Paul on the other hand lead the way beyond the impasses in O'Donovan and Yoder? Can he resolve their dilemma of a state which must be connected with God's eschatological deed in Christ but never directly or permanently so? At first glance I doubt it. After all Paul sets the scene for a lot of these tensions and struggles with his use of political imagery, which is so much more evocative, broader and richer than Paul's own application of it.

Upon a closer look, there is something inspiring in Paul's vision.

In a sense both Yoder and O'Donovan still write very much from a 'Christendom' perspective, either from within (and at times against) a political-religious discourse of a 'nation under God', or from within a society with still very visible Christian institutions and a State church. It would be foolish to cut off prematurely tried and tested channels of interaction and inspiration between (officials of the) church and (officials of the) state. It is useful to be reminded by thinkers like O'Donovan that our Western political structures were nurtured and encouraged to grow in a long history of contact and interaction with the Christian message and the Christian church. But as Western societies become more and more secular and pluralistic at a high speed it might be time to think and dream about new ways to be the church. To give institutionalized privileges to the Christian community may one day not gain majority support anymore. The prophetic voice of the church might not be heard anymore, if the authorities so addressed feel less and less bound by Christian ethics in the first place. Paul's vision could be a resource in such a situation by assuring us that this is not the end of the world and not the end of the church.

Christ's interaction with 'Caesar' has become enormously important and influential in the history of the West. Maybe the show-down of the young Christian movement with hostile emperors in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century fatefully paved the way for the Constantinian turn: If Caesar can be the direct enemy of Christ, almost his parody or

dark mirror-image, can Caesar not also be Christ's deputy and intermediary? Much of Western history can be read as the interaction of two titanic actors on the eschatological stage, the church and the state. Out of these interactions grew both innovative and beneficial political and cultural fruits as well as a lot of tragic suffering.

Paul can perhaps help us to unlearn these hard-wired configurations of two almost equally sized titans struggling together on the stage of history. Instead the metaphor of Christ the Lord could be firmly placed back where it first and foremost belonged in Paul's view: In the life of the church. If we learn from Paul that the Lordship of Christ first of all means a call to faithfulness and a promise of hope for the church, even the dissolution of old configurations, such as the church being a state church or Christianity controlling the majority discourse, does not have to end in resignation but can free up creative space for new experiments in what it could mean to be the church. Instead of seeing the church as one of two principal actors, involved in a perennial, titanic struggle with the state, we could picture it with Paul's help as the primary context for believers, formative and nurturing, and equipping them to negotiate their way in all sorts of other contexts of which the political world would be one, but not the primary one, nor even the most important one. This church would still interact at times with political rulers and participate in the world of politics, just as it would interact with other areas of life. But it would be challenged to deal with its own faithfulness first, before setting out to denounce and criticize bad rulers. And it would be encouraged to live fearlessly in changing political landscapes, with greater or lesser influence, and do in hope what it has to do. It could perhaps no longer impose its vision of the humble state or the state that heeds the voice of the Christian prophets on the world of politics. But it would still be free to act and interact from an understanding that political institutions are needed but that political authority is relative. It could still gain hope, reassurance and patience from the vision of Christ's Lordship. It could appreciate and support the contributions of political authority for human flourishing even if they looked modest or wanting from a Christological perspective. It could calmly render political authorities their due, knowing that they are indispensable right now. At the same time it would be deaf to the siren song of political messianism, because its hope of salvation would be located far beyond what happens in palaces and parliaments and because its experiences of a

partially healed and 'true political' takes place away from the centers of power. It may well be that Paul, who strikes us so much as yesterday's man in his concrete political teaching, could be in some aspects our guide for the future.

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